

THE area around Dean and its prehistoric activity have been discussed in these *Transactions* on a number of occasions and the purpose of this paper is to present this accumulated data along with some more recent discoveries in the area. Figure 1 is a map of the area covered by this paper, with a more detailed insert for the immediate area around Dean (A).

The first fleeting mention was made by Mr William Dickinson¹ reporting “two earthen mounds some seventy yards apart, and which may have been places of sepulchre or, more likely, butts for practice with bow and arrow”. The true origin of these mounds, located at NY 073 250, is as yet unknown.

J. R. Mason’s paper² records the discovery, in 1918, of a boulder bearing a cup and ring mark near Dean church (A1 on Figure 1).

In 1876 workmen discovered some urns in a railway cutting near Ullock (B on Figure 1). From what little is recorded we find that two were “‘incense cups’ . . . exactly similar to those found at Garlands, Carlisle” and sadly, that more urns of different sizes and colours were injured or destroyed by the workmen before being recognised.³ The urns were discovered “within a bow shot of where stood a circle of large boulder stones”. This circle has now vanished, but it begs the question, what else has been lost?

During the 1950s and the early 1970s excavations were conducted near Branthwaite, Workington.⁴ The site lies behind High House Farm at NY 056 247 (C on Figure 1). The first discovery was “a hollowed canoe with a carefully inserted backboard”. Then the possible remains of a platform were also found – some of the wood showing evidence of deliberate sharpening. There were indications of burning in certain areas, though no finds were recovered from either of these excavations. Samples of wood from the canoe were sent for dating after the excavations and they have since been re-examined by Cambridge University, producing a date of 3545 B.P. +/- 50, placing the age of the boat to the Bronze Age.⁵

More recent exploration of the vicinity around Dean Parish has turned up a number of new finds:

1. The first find was a well-worn possible cap stone, which is a stone that could have been used as the roof of a burial chamber. It is a large sandstone slab with a very uneven surface, measuring around 100 cm at its greatest extent, a width of approximately 80 cm and a depth of 14 cm, and it was discovered near a fenced bank along with an accumulation of stones at A2 (Fig. 1). A return visit in the low light of a late midwinter afternoon was made and the remains of a cup and ring, found toward the upper centre of the stone, were revealed. The find was reported and a rubbing, which proved difficult, was duly taken (Fig. 2). The rubbing appeared to disclose the faint remains of some concentric design toward the lower right of the stone, but even with repeated rubbing attempts nothing more promising could be discerned.
2. The cap stone is located about 5 m to the south-west of an old well noted on the

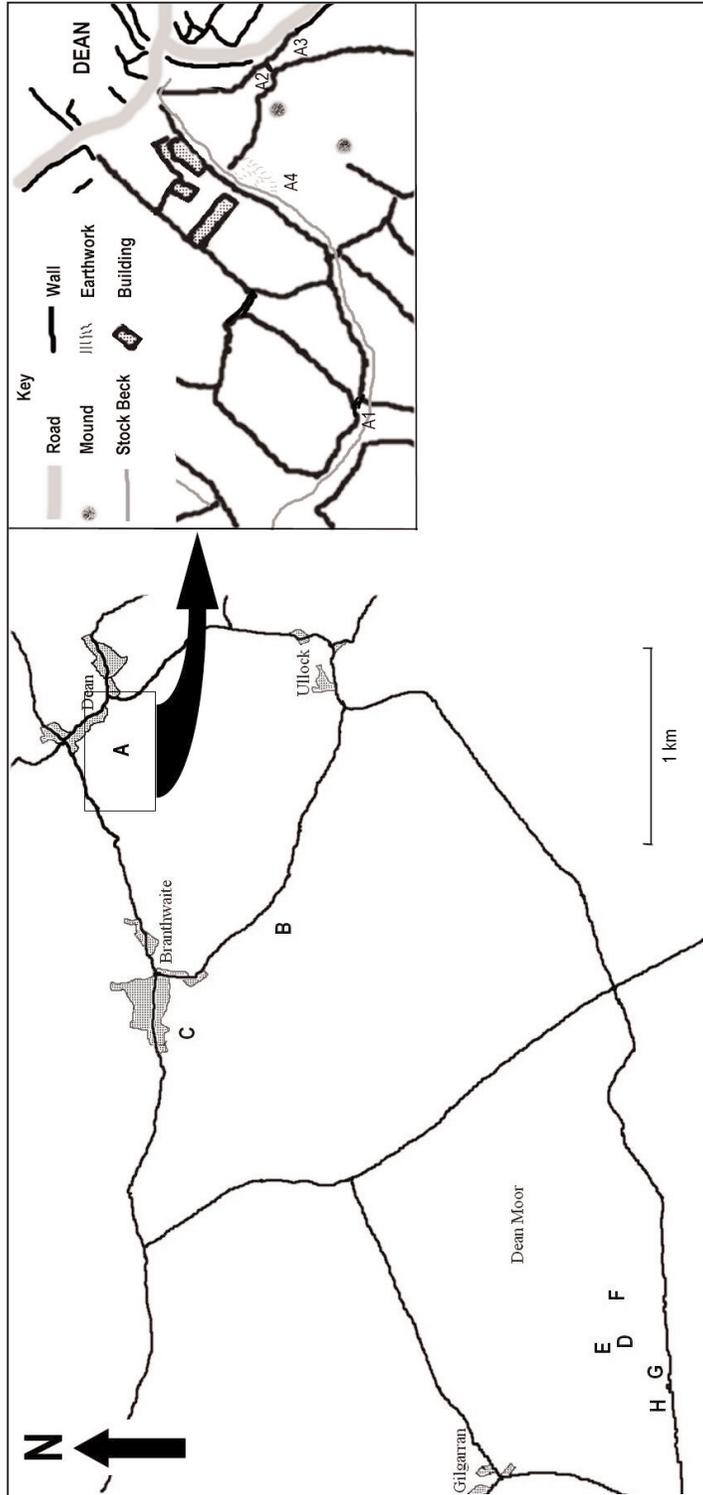


FIG. 1. Map of the Dean area

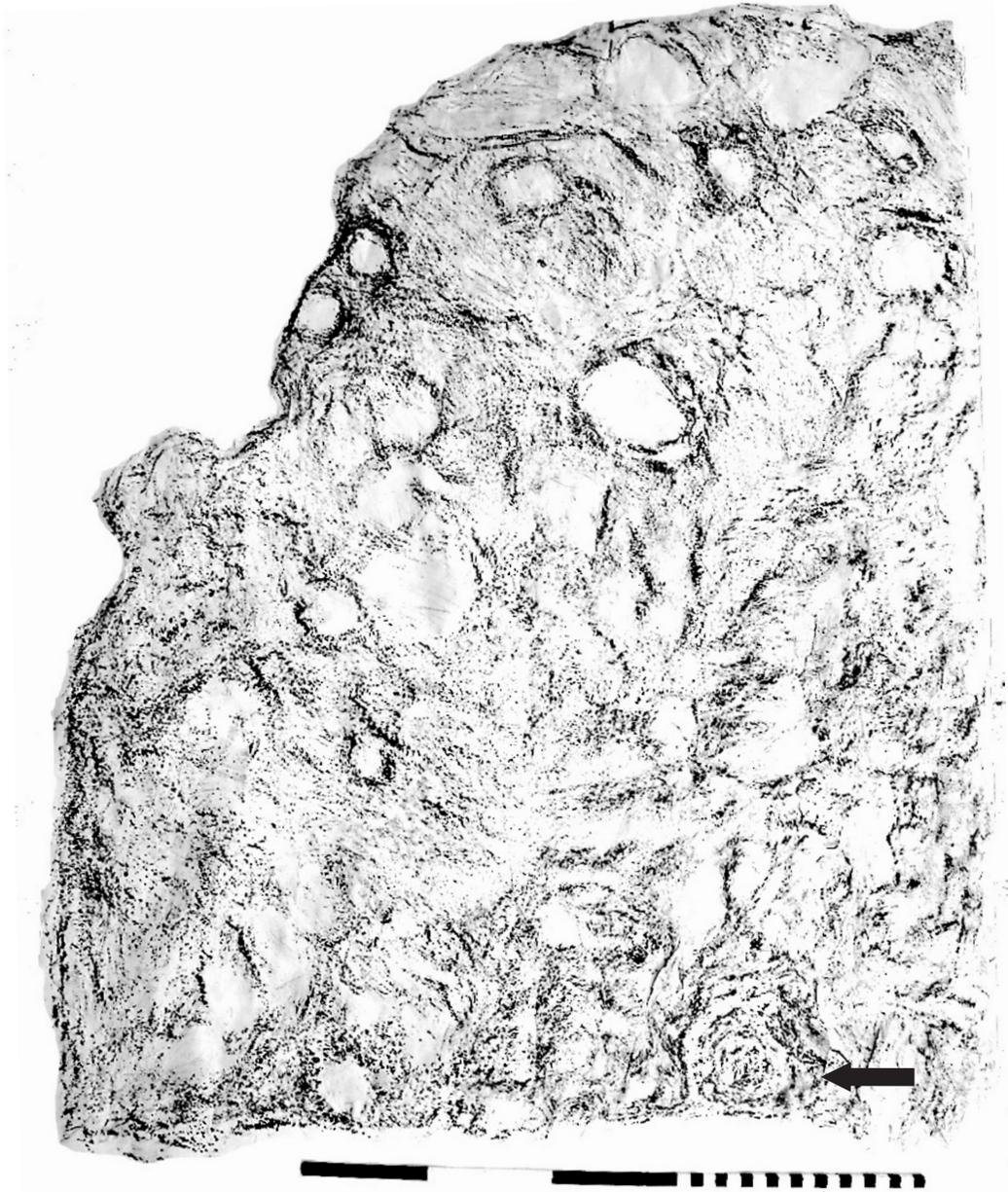


FIG. 2. Dean cap stone rubbing

O.S. map of the 1850s but not on the present day map. Around the well (A3 on Fig. 1), a number of worked chert chippings were found after the field had been ploughed. The specimens from Dean were a blue/grey colour. Figure 3 shows two worked stone tools retrieved from the site.

3. The remains of a previously undiscovered stone circle (A4 on Fig. 1) were also located in the field containing the earthen mounds mentioned above. A plan of



FIG. 3. Dean chert tools

the remaining stones of the circle in relation to the mounds is provided in Figure 4. Sited on slightly sloping ground the circle has views to the south-west of Branthwaite Edge, Jackie Planting and a distant Dean Moor which the Midwinter sun sets over at an azimuth of about 225°. Toward the east are Whin Fell, Fellbarrow and Grasmoor and to the south-east are the Loweswater fells from whence the Midwinter sun rises out from a notch with an azimuth of around 139° between Carling Knott and Blake Fell. There are four stones remaining *in situ* and from their positioning indications are that the circle would have been relatively large in size.

4. Investigations into the Dean Moor area produced an early reference to the stone circle which today we know as Studfold Gate, NY 0400 2235 (D on Fig. 1). The boundaries of Whillimoor located immediately to the south are given *c.*1447 and the circle site was mentioned then as the standing stones of “Frothowe”.⁶ This circle and its surrounds revealed some further discoveries.

The Studfold Gate circle is located at a height of around 200 m above sea level just below the highest part of the plateau on which it stands and has excellent panoramic views. To the north are the hills of Dumfries and Galloway and the lowlands of the Solway Plain, stretching across the eastern horizon are the Lakeland fells from Binsey to Skiddaw through Grasmoor to Haycock. To the south is High Park and to the west the Irish Sea and the Isle of Man. The Midwinter sun rises impressively at an azimuth of around 136° up from and then along the top of Haycock, which is situated on the Ennerdale and Wasdale watershed over 15.5 km away and from the circle is the most southerly prominent peak visible of the Lakeland fells. The position is indicated on Plate 1 by a small arrow. Seven hours later the Midwinter sun sets over the northern-most tip of St Bees Head, with an azimuth of approximately 229°. The Midsummer sun rises at around 04:40 from behind Caer Mote with an azimuth of 45° and sets some 17¼ hours later, across the Solway Firth, in the region of Cairngarroch in Galloway, with an azimuth of *c.*314°.

The stones are sandstone, set in a circle with a diameter of approximately 33.5 m. Just west of centre is a cairn about 6.7 m across and the site was excavated by J. R. Mason and H. Valentine in the 1920s.⁷ They note that previous reference had been made to it by J. Clifton Ward in 1878.⁸

Cut through by a wall running from north to south, the western side of the circle has suffered as the result of a dense plantation which again was noted by Mason and Valentine, but the eastern stones are far more distinctive and it was upon two of these stones that further examples of rock art were discovered. Figure 5 is a plan of the remains of the Studfold Gate circle and it was upon stone 4 that an intricate rock art design was found. The style of the rock art motifs could be considered as in keeping with what might be termed as a “Cumbrian” style. This design consists of a number of chevrons, some shallow cups and a serpentine groove. A rubbing and a photograph of the stone in its setting are presented in Figure 6 and Plate 1. Stone 6 on the plan bears a groove effect which has been marked deeply into its western face.

There have been various attempts to try and understand the imagery found within the context of prehistoric rock art. Consideration has been made with regard to the influence of entopic imagery⁹ on the designs, though the work by



PLATE 2. Studfold Gate polissoir



PLATE 1. Studfold Gate rock art stone 4 and circle

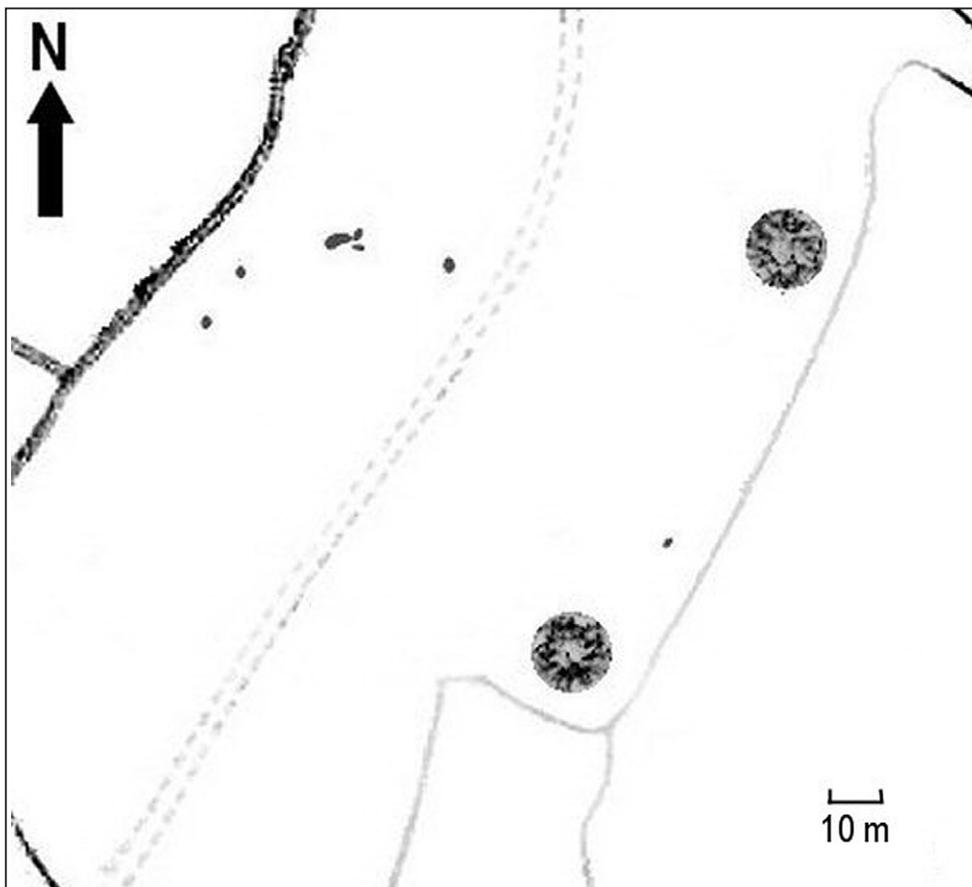


FIG. 4. Dean circle plan

Dronfield¹⁰ suggests that entopic images may be fewer in number than at first thought. The effect of hallucination has been considered and common ethnographic descriptions of trance have also been deliberated.¹¹ The circular motifs have been likened to structures such as hillforts, but the rock art and the hillforts are not contemporary. That said there are circular structures which are of similar chronology to the rock art, from passage tombs to stone circles. It has also been suggested that the rock art may represent some kind of map, but this does not tend to hold true when considering the variance of rock art and the locations in which it has been discovered. The one thing that is certain is that as with all rock art the lighting conditions can make a remarkable difference to what is seen and the decorated stones at the Studfold Gate circle are certainly no exception to the rule.

5. Just to the north of the circle at NY 0399 2242 (E on Fig. 1), a polissoir (Plate 2) was located. It was found down by the side of the wall which intersects the circle, appearing to have at one time been used as building material. Polissoir stones could be used to finish rough-outs of Langdale stone axes and it is noted that Mason and Valentine refer to “a good specimen of a stone axe-hammer 8 ins.

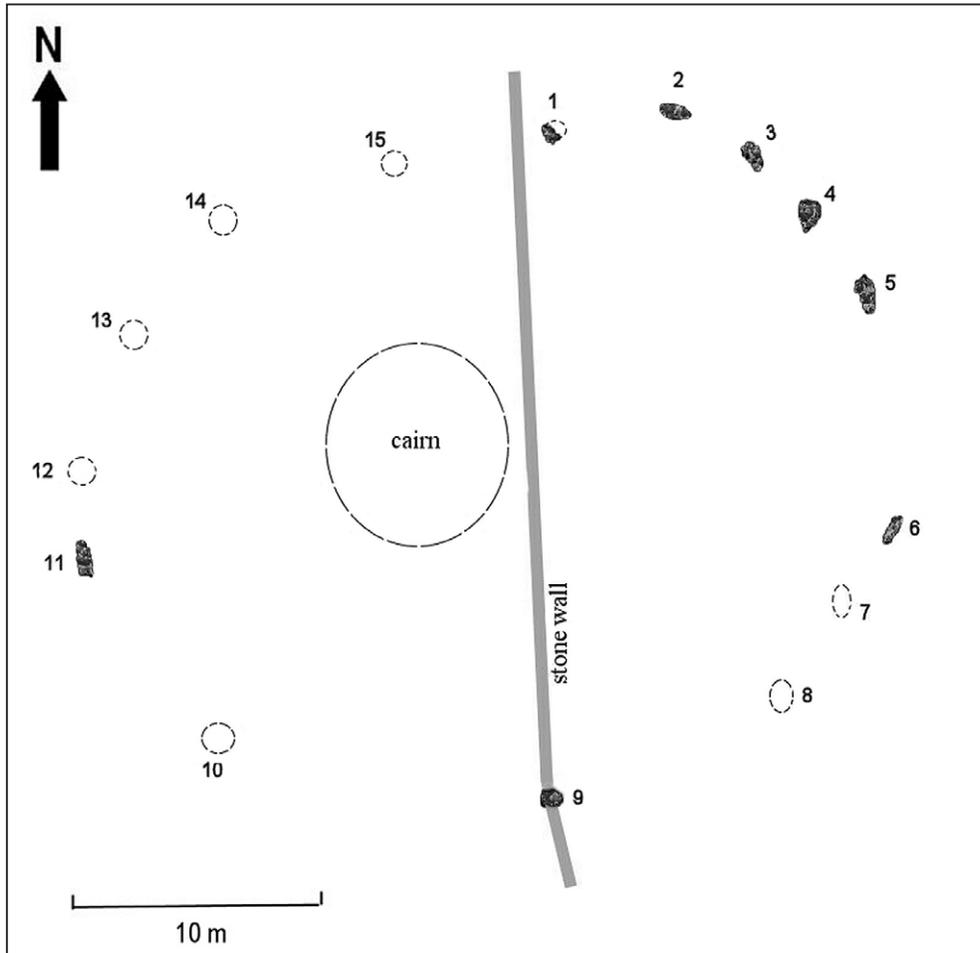


FIG. 5. Studfold Gate stone circle plan

long which had been found in the village of Gilgarran about half-a-mile away".¹²

The position of the polissoir was deemed precarious with a great chance that it would soon be lost and so with the kind permission of Mrs Beverley, the landowner, it was moved to the Keswick Museum where there is a good selection of stone tools on display.

6. To the east of Studfold circle (F on Fig. 1) there are also some previously unreported probable burial cairns which are spread out across the plateau. Some of them are positioned toward the edge looking out across Dean Moor to the north and having a spacious view over the Solway and Scotland. There are around eight in number.
7. Turning to the south west of the circle (G on Fig. 1) there is an accumulation of stone laying with a south-east to north-west orientation which very much resembles the remains of a collapsed burial chamber. Approximately 9.5 m long and 2.0 m at its widest, there is the distinct impression of structure about these

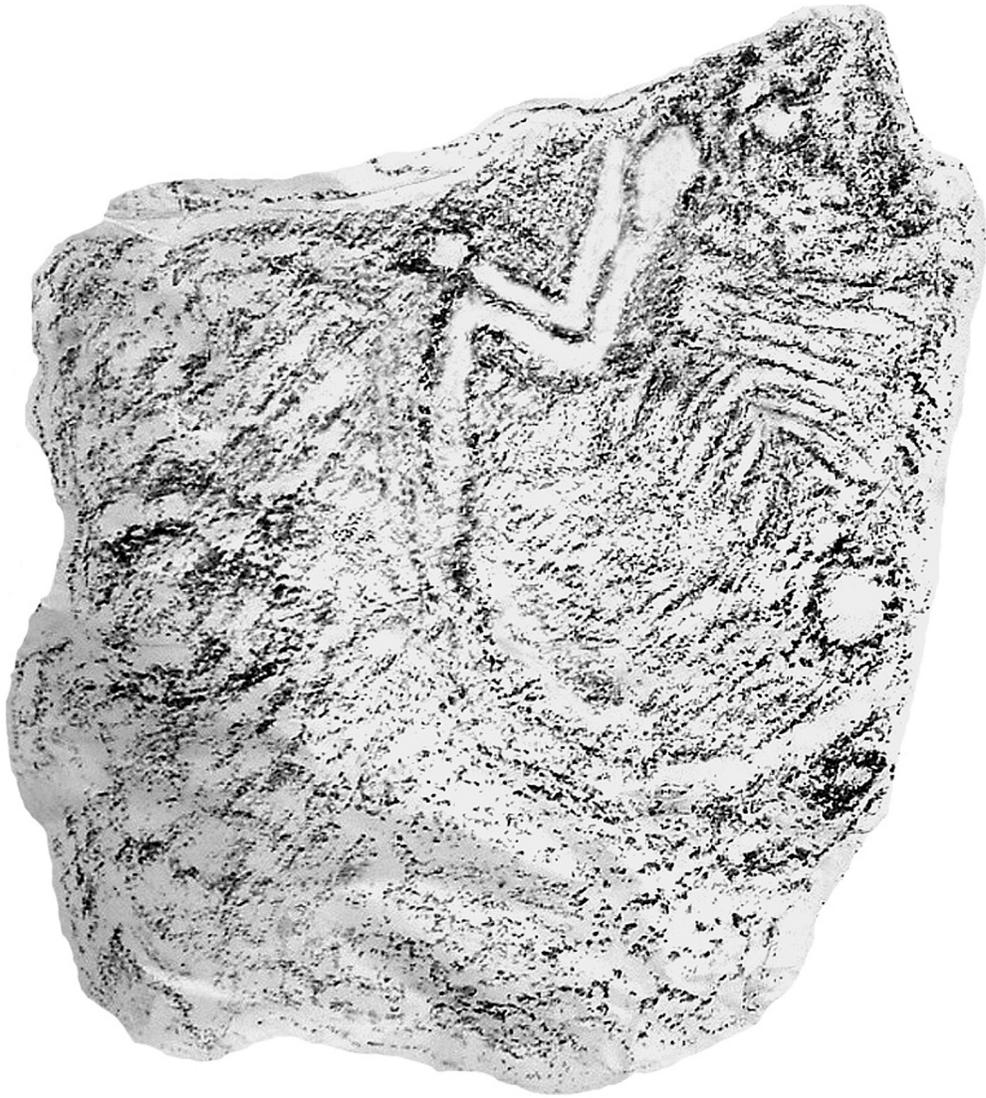


FIG. 6. Studfold Gate stone 4 rubbing

remnants, the western end having the proliferation of considerably larger stones but with the eastern section very much retaining a sense of arrangement. It was discovered at NY 038 222 and looking along the structure from the south-east toward the larger stones gives a bearing of around 310° , which might indicate a Midsummer sunset position and is similar to that found at the proposed burial chamber at Urswick.¹³ This is interesting when we consider Burl's assessment and grouping of chambered tombs and their axis, which he states "nearly always pointed somewhere between NNE and SSE".¹⁴ The only known possible remains of chambered tombs in Cumbria would so far seem to indicate an inclination for the north-west.

There is another similarity between the site at Urswick and the one near Studfold Gate which is perhaps worthy of mention. Neither is placed on top of the highest land in the locality. In both cases the possible structures are sited in such a way that the true distant horizon is obscured by the lay of the land in the immediate vicinity and in both cases a little relocation toward the north-west would have brought it fully into view. Could this positioning have been intentional?

8. A little further south-west are also what may be the remains of two other possible cairns, down nearer the road to Pica around Friar Bank Wood at NY 036 221 (H on Figure 1).

Conclusion

The subject of this paper covers an area of approximately 20 square km and yet in this small section of land we have evidence for three stone circles, there are four examples of rock art – two of which are rather elaborate designs. Along with the various cairns, a dugout canoe and the prehistoric pottery, sadly now lost, we also have some indication of the presence of possible burial chambers with the cap stone and the remains on Dean Moor. Together they all serve to emphasise the quantity of prehistoric activity actually within the vicinity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Stan Beckensall and Mrs Beverley for their help.

References.

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- ¹² Mason, J. R. and Valentine H., *op. cit.*, 269.
- ¹³ Hood, S., Wilson, D., "Further investigations into the astronomical alignments at Cumbrian prehistoric sites", *CW3*, iii, 203-212.
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