



THE WEALDSTONE

[Photo by H. E. Chiosso]



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THE COMBINED DIG AT BROCKLEY HILL (SULLONIACÆ), 3RD SEPTEMBER, 1949

THE WEALD STONE

BY PERCY DAVENPORT

IN nothing is the great contrast between the appearance and conditions of ancient Harrow Weald (or rather, Weald, to give it its older name) and of the same area to-day so manifest as in the case of Wealdstone. When the London and Birmingham Railway Company projected its line to the Midlands through Harrow, building it in 1838, local opposition deflected its route away from the Hill. Round the site finally chosen for the local station at the southern or lower end of Weald there sprang up, on either side of the ancient Harrow Lane, a collection of mediocre houses and shops, which reflected the lack of foresight in planning which was one of the characteristics of the Industrial Revolution from which we are still suffering to-day.

That area assimilated to itself the name of Wealdstone which, before that time, had been applied to a few farmhouses and agricultural cottages a mile or so to the north, clustering round the line of the old lane, and not far from the wayside pond which, within recent memory, stood at the corner of Weald Lane, near Wealdstone House.

By the roadside near that spot there had stood for at least some hundreds of years, and how much longer no one knows, a certain stone. It was well over a yard in length and some two feet in depth, and in its present recumbent position, with the narrow side vertical, it presents a fairly smooth upper surface, having no well defined markings and inclining some 25 degrees from the horizontal.

What is the origin of the Wealdstone, which has sometimes been called a sarsen stone?

It is not local in origin. The embedded pebbles clearly indicate that it consists of a conglomerate or "Puddingstone" which, probably by natural action in geological time, has been carried over a distance of many miles to this or some nearby spot.

"Some (sarsen stones or greywethers)", says Mr. E. M. Davies, in *Geology of London and South-East England*, "contain unworn flints or flint pebbles. The Hertfordshire Puddingstone is one type of these conglomerate sarsens." He further points out

that they occur also in the Drift, and this is not inconsistent with the possibility that the Weald Stone, whose composition seems to fit in well with this description, may have been transported in the Glacial Drift from Hertfordshire, where it was originally formed. During the excavations at Brockley Hill in 1947 a small piece of Puddingstone was dug up from one of the trenches.

The speculation has been advanced that the Weald Stone is associated with the existence of prehistoric man in our area. This may be due to the fact that sarsen stones were much used by the megalithic builders, e.g. at Avebury, Stonehenge, and elsewhere. If I may quote Mr. Davies again—"There is a tendency to associate them with megalithic monuments even where they have never been shifted by man. The names sarsen (Saracen) and druid stones confirm this tendency. The term greywethers refers to their resemblance to a flock of sheep resting on the downs."

It only remains to add, in considering the remote history of the Weald Stone, that any suggested association with prehistoric man must, in the absence of further evidence, be treated with reserve. While I myself would not be prepared to rule out altogether such a possibility, I think that much further research is called for, e.g. into the various traces of tumuli at Barrow Point Hill in Pinner and the tumuli, past and present, on or near Stanmore Common, and also into the origins of Grimsdyke, not so very far distant from the Stone.

Moreover, it must not be overlooked that in the Harrow area are other wayside stones, not only in Harrow Weald itself, but also in Pinner, Wembley, Sudbury, and elsewhere. It may be that here, and at the other places named, these stones were used to delimit local boundaries or to preserve the lines of the ancient tracks or lanes. Boundary marks were vitally necessary in mediæval times in defining individual ownerships and the common fields of the manor and so preventing encroachments on these and on the highways. Numerous examples of such encroachments occur in the Harrow manorial rolls.

My task is here much simpler. I should like to trace back the history of the Stone as far as records already discovered will allow, commencing from the present time and working backwards to the earliest references. To-day it stands, embedded in the pavement, close to the "Red Lion," Harrow Weald, and its history over the last hundred years has been

authoritatively set out in a letter to me from Miss Margaret D. Smith, of Oxhey Lane Farm, Hatch End.

The present "Red Lion" is the third of that name. The first, whose erection must have dated back probably into the earlier part of the eighteenth century, was owned and kept by Miss Smith's grandfather, William Smith, innkeeper and farmer. About 1834 he built, and lived at, the second "Red Lion." "When they were digging the foundations out for the cellar," writes Miss Smith, "the big stone, the Weald Stone, was found, and it was placed at the Harrow Weald Lane side of the "Red Lion," and it was still there when my father, Henry Smith, sold the property about 1892; where it was placed some years before, and was sometimes used for a mounting stone. Harrow Weald is very interesting to me. We have been here 50 years, but I loved it when it was a scattered village with few houses and many fields."

The second "Red Lion," which all residents of Harrow Weald except the most recent comers will remember, stood, until the nineteen thirties, within a few feet of the present building, and a photograph of it taken in 1905 appeared in the issue of the *Harrow Observer* of 6th January, 1949. It shows the stone, as described by Miss Smith, on the pavement of the main road, close to the wall, under the corner lamp of the inn.

When the present or third "Red Lion" was built between the wars, and the second one pulled down, the stone, by arrangement with the Harrow Urban District Council, was transferred to, and fixed in, its present position.

If it be suggested that the stone cannot have had any human associations before 1834—the approximate date of the erection of the second "Red Lion," when the stone was found there according to Miss Smith's statement, which I certainly accept at its face value—it is only necessary to remind the reader that a stone of the weight of the Weald Stone, lying in soft damp clay soil, without any underlying support, would inevitably, if left to itself, sink below the surface of the ground within a few years.

That is what I suggest happened here in the days when people, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. Fortunately, though fortuitously, the stone was rediscovered in 1834. Evidence will now be presented which, taken with the foregoing, will, it is submitted, establish beyond all reasonable doubt that this is the stone which has given its name to Wealdstone.

The English Place-Name Society, in its county volume for Middlesex, derives the name Wealdstone from a stone which, the editors conjecture, was perhaps originally a boundary mark separating Harrow Weald from the rest of Harrow parish. The earliest evidence they adduce for the name is that shown in John Rocque's map of Middlesex, 1754.

They add that nearby may have lived John atte Stone in 1282 and John Stute de Stone in 1548. As to these two men I will only say that the first, from evidence contained in the court rolls, lived at Wembley, as did others, probably of the same family, whose Christian names carry the same affix; while the second, "Stute," is a misreading or miscopying of "Strete." Many of the name of "atte Strete atte Stone" or "at Strete de Stone," with variant spellings, lived at Pinner. So that these two names point to the existence of stones both at Wembley and Pinner which gave their names to people who lived near them, and should not be related to the stone at Weald at all.

Where then was this stone at Weald which, it is claimed, gave its name to the locality?

It is possible to give at least two instances of the name Weald Stone, both earlier than that shown on the map of 1754 and both taken from the court rolls, as follows:—

In 1702 the death was presented of Hannah Marsh, of Harrow, who was seised at the time of her death of a messuage and orchard "lying at Weald Stone."

In 1696 the surrender was presented of a head tenement and half a hide of land called Ashins (probably "Ashlyns," where the notorious miser, Daniel Dancer, later lived) to Richard Edlin, "of Weald Stone, yeoman."

Wealdstone was so known, then, at least as early as 1696. But we can go some two hundred years further back still in our references to the stone, and indeed one of these locates it as being then in "Harrow Lane," i.e. the present High Road or High Street, Harrow Weald, where the "Red Lion" stands to-day.

Here they are, taken from the rolls of the Manor of Harrow, in those sections dealing specifically with Weald:—

- (1) 23 *Henry VII.*—"Richard Bukberd ought to cleanse his ditch lying between *le Weld* and *le Stone*, four perches in length." (He was amerced 8d.)

- (2) 14 *Henry VIII.*—"It is ordered that John Smith shall cleanse his ditch at *the Stone in Harrowe Lane* before the feast of Pentecost, under penalty of 12d, and that Thomas Tournour shall widen the runnel in his meadow *against the Stone* before the feast of Pentecost under penalty of 12d."
- (3) 1 *Edward VI.*—"They present that William Page has not cleansed his ditch from *le Stone* to Woodfeld Corner as he had it under penalty in the last View. Therefore he is in mercy 4d. And he is ordered again to cleanse the said ditch before the feast of All Saints under penalty of 5s. (At the previous view—38 *Henry VIII.*—William Page was presented for not having yet made his ditch at Garratts, as ordered at the last View.)

These three extracts from the court rolls give definite evidence of the dampness of the soil in the vicinity of the Stone.

Here then are three clear references made to *the Stone* in Weald in the earlier years of the Tudor dynasty. It was a recognised landmark there at that time and it stood in the High Road, Harrow Weald, then known as Harrow Lane, near the spot which Rocque on his map of Middlesex marks as Weald Stone, in other words, near the "Red Lion" there. It was known as "The Stone" and because, as we have already seen, there were other well-known stones in other parts of the Harrow area, this one would be obviously and appropriately designated the Weald Stone, to distinguish it from the Pinner Stone, where John atte Strete atte Stone lived, or the Wembley Stone, where Ranulf ate Stone and John ate Stone lived. (These are all names from the court rolls, appearing there under Pinner and Wembley respectively.)

These entries in the Tudor rolls were guaranteed by oath, by "The Twelve for the King" (as the second roll from which I have quoted above records). Indeed, these men, the Homage, every one of them a Harrow man of substance, are recorded by name as follows:—

Richard and John Edlyn.	William Page of Oxendone.
Thomas Page	John a Grenehille of Roxheth.
John Cok.	John Page.
John Downer.	William Sharpe.
Henry Smith.	John at Stret at Stone.
John Osmund.	John Ayleward.

They represent all parts of Greater Harrow.

Early in 1949 the Member for Harrow East asked the Minister of Works whether he would consider scheduling the Stone as an ancient monument, to which Mr. Key replied that he would prefer to leave its protection to local effort. At a meeting of the Harrow Council on 25th March, 1949, a motion was unanimously passed instructing the Town Planning Committee to consider whether it is the Council's province to arrange for the protection of objects of antiquity. While praiseworthy steps have already been taken by the Urban District Council to safeguard the Stone, my own suggestion is that the inner kerb, where it now stands flush with the edge of the Stone, might be splayed out for a short distance. This would provide sufficient space to erect round the Stone an ornamental, yet simple and inexpensive, openwork iron railing or fence, crowned with a tablet drawing public attention to the significance of the Stone.