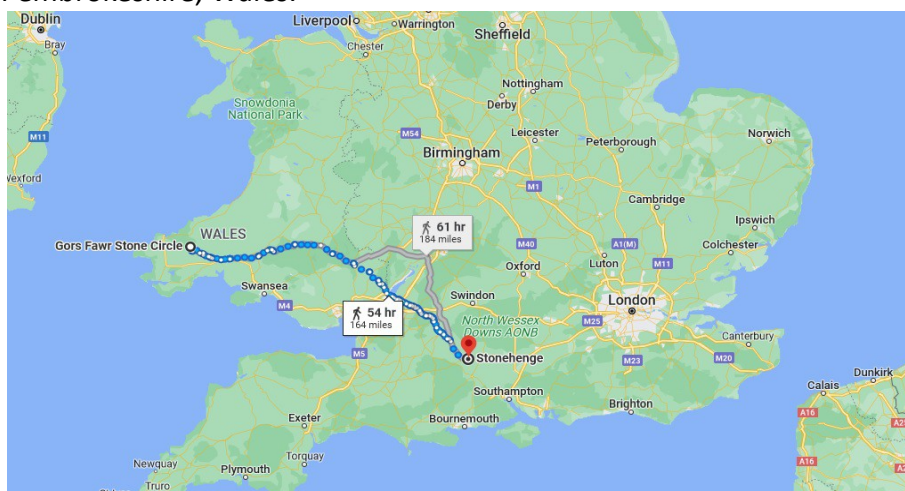




Stonehenge¹

Stonehenge - An inspiration that keeps on growing and an embodiment of a myth.

There are not many places in this World that would hold equally interesting and etheric origins as Stonehenge does. It is a place of legends and myths as well as secrets, many of which, despite the best efforts of archaeologists and scientists, remain undiscovered and sometimes misunderstood. Despite that, very many people nowadays treat Stonehenge with respect and reverence usually reserved for the most sacred of places. It is a place that, due to its unique origin and lack of definitive answers to its purpose, allows people to answer such a question for themselves, which, until such a time that it would be utterly disproved, remains as valid and true as any other. To look at Stonehenge is to look at the past and see it unveil itself in the present. One thing that is certain about it is that the Stones it is made of are not native to where it resides, but rather come from Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, Wales.²



Locations: Stonehenge now and remains of stone circle discovered in Preseli Hills in Wales³

Another is that perhaps it is not about what purpose it had initially, but what purpose it has now,

- 1 Robert Pawlikowski, *Stonehenge*, [photography], (2019), Private Collection.
- 2 Darvill, Tiomothy, Peter Marshall, Mike Parker Pearson, and Geoff Wainwright, 'Stonehenge Remodelled', *Antiquity*, 86.334 (2012), 1022
- 3 Google Maps, Preseli Hills to Stonehenge, [map], (2023), <<https://www.google.com/maps>> [accessed 4 January 2023]

or what significance it holds for people nowadays. To do that, one has to look at various theories, myths and approaches that different spiritual organisations have.

The past is ever present and reaches us in various ways, sometimes physically, sometimes as a legend passed down from generation to generation, carrying the memories, meanings and lessons sealed away in the tale's words, but sometimes, the world is gifted with the window to the past, where something of old remains in its physical form, altered by the time, akin to how the legends change and develop when passed from mouth to mouth. The journey of discovery and unearthing of secrets relating to Stonehenge starts with the myths, which apart from holding truths transcribed from oral traditions, serve as inspiration for researchers interested in the unknown. The questions of "how", "when", and "where from" come initially from the legends that surround the Stones. Albeit disproved, the most famous fable about them, tells the story of Merlin, who upon the request of the King, moved the stones from Ireland to Salsbury Plains where they reside now.⁴ Merlin is one of the most famous figures of the Arthurian Legends, telling the tales of old, of Celts of the past, druids and wizards and magic capable of crossing space and time. Regardless of the legend that he originates from, the persona of Merlin is usually described as an old and wise mage holding immense, incomparable, supernatural power capable of feats impossible to achieve through mortal means. The fact that the Legend about the stones was even written proves how significant they were and how much mystery they held for the people throughout history, connecting them with Merlin elevates them to spiritual, nearly divine legend, as they were touched by power not available to mortals. Even then, people knew that the stones did not come from the place where they are located now, and this is something that finds itself proven by the archaeologists nowadays and partially answers the question of „where from“, however, the questions „why“ and „how“ seem to be unanswered due to instant disregard of anything that can not be proven by scientific means, simply because the science is vastly restricted by the physical tools it has available to test various theories, the reverse of innocent until proven guilty seems to translate to false until proven true. The „how“ and „why“ are, as it seems, of no effect on the present attitude towards the millennia-old monument.

When looking at the part of the English Heritage website dedicated to the monument one can read that there is no definite answer as to what the functionality was, but disregarding the fact that the stones were erected multiple times after falling prey to the forces of nature, the editors of the website make a connection between the present location and the movement of the planetary bodies, once again simplifying the meaning to the one easily understood by science – time measurement. According to them the stones, once moved from Wales, were erected in such a way to align with the movement of the planets as 'The people who built Stonehenge were farmers, herders and pastoralists and so the changing seasons would have been of immense significance.'⁵ of course, this does not explain how such farmers, herders and pastoralists were capable of such a feat of moving the stones or why exactly was it needed for them, especially since people raised animals and tended the fields throughout the world without the help of such a massive monument. Were the settlers incapable of making connections between weather and temperature and how it would affect their livelihood or was Stonehenge somehow capable of predicting the weather and how the season would be? This seems as much of a legend as the one that says that Merlin moved them using his Magic and is equally purposeful to the legendary reason of moving them to mark the death of soldiers as the legend says. In opposition to this, C.M. Cusack mentions

4 Geoffrey of Monmouth, Michael D Reeve, and Neil Wright, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of the De Gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae)*, NED - New edition (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 160-193.

5 English Heritage, *Understanding Stonehenge*, N.A., <<https://www.englishheritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/things-to-do/stone-circle/celestialstonehenge/>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

that 'Stonehenge and other such megalithic monuments are usually deemed to be temples[...] when other, pragmatic and secular, purposes are difficult to identify'.⁶ This gives a bit of light towards the phenomena of Stonehenge's unusual fame compared to other, younger stone circles. Be it the size or the age, Stonehenge can be described as the most widely and well-known monument of such kind in the whole world.⁷ Due to the sheer amount of visitors each year, it can be fairly deemed that it has an impact on people and the culture, be it people who wish to see the Stones, get closer to the Supernatural or are an enthusiast of the archaeological sciences wishing to see for themselves what makes so many people wonder and research this old monument. For this reason, Stonehenge affects the culture of the world more so, than, possibly, any other structure. It is the source of debates, arguments and theories (such as those mentioned above) feeding the interest of various groups of people of different academic backgrounds, religions and cultures. It is also at the centre of the religious revival of Druidry and many various Pagan beliefs, its mystery and somewhat freedom of interpretation fuels the beliefs and explanations many wish to find. As with every religion and belief, this makes it very easy to place among dogmas, rituals and significant sites that followers may wish to attend, going as far as to create other henges on a smaller scale, similar to one presented below, located in Castell-nedd in Wales.



Stone Circle from Ashden Gardens in Neath⁸

Looking at the entry on the website of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, we can find information about the spiritual importance of Stonehenge, going as far as to call it a temple.⁹ Or to liken it to Mecca.¹⁰ It is further said that the current attitude towards Stonehenge, particularly the celebration of the Summer Solstice arose in the 1920s, this was then, in turn connected to the Druids.¹¹ They continued that tradition, which gained more momentum with the efforts of Gerald Brousseau Gardner, the founder of the modern Witchcraft tradition – Wicca and the subsequent effect it had on the Modern Druidry due to his close connection with Nuinn - Ross Nichols (legal

6 Carole Cusack, 'Charmed Circle: Stonehenge, Contemporary Paganism, And Alternative Archeology', *Numen*. 59. 138-155. (p.148)

7 Cusack, 'Charmed Circle' p. 140

8 Robert Pawlikowski, *Stone Circle Castell-Nedd*, [photography], (2023), Private Collection.

9 Emma Restall Orr, *Stonehenge – A View From The Moment*, 2000, <<https://druidry.org/resources/stonehenge-a-view-from-the-moment>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

10 Joanne Letchford, Adam Stout, *Summer Holidays At Stonehenge*, 2011, <<https://druidry.org/resources/summer-holidays-at-stonehenge>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

11 Cusack, 'Charmed Circle' p. 148

name), the founder of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids who reimagined Modern Druidry and increased the number of the holy days celebrated by the Order.¹² C.M. Cusack says that „The desire of Druids to enact rituals at prehistoric sites such as Stonehenge is complicated by the fabricated knowledge of the association between Druids and Stonehenge”.¹³ This points towards the difference in understanding between the archeological discussion and the religious understanding and significance, even though this does not exclude the ritualistic nature of the Stone Circle itself. The connection between neo-Pagans and Stonehenge seems to be imprinted in people's minds to the point that they are quick to discard anything else but the theories proving their point. This of course, is only of significance towards understanding the origin of Stonehenge, as, just like with multiple churches and chapels across the United Kingdom being changed into restaurants or cafes, buildings and structures have a tendency of changing their designed purpose, therefore it is of no consequence whether Stonehenge was originally a temple or place of worship, as due to the efforts of Pagan movements in the 20th century, it is one now and will be for foreseeable future.

The subject of Stonehenge is one that requires in-depth analysis with the understanding that the answers one might be looking for are not easy to find and despite the best effort might never be. It is more productive to analyse the changes the structure underwent and the purpose it serves nowadays – as a place of worship, mystery and attraction for tourists, as well as an undeniable relic of the past, as this makes Stonehenge more valuable in a cultural sense, than the knowledge of its past will ever provide.

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¹² Cusack, 'Charmed Circle' p. 147

¹³ Cusack, 'Charmed Circle' p. 148

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