

SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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Causewayed Enclosures and Stone Circles

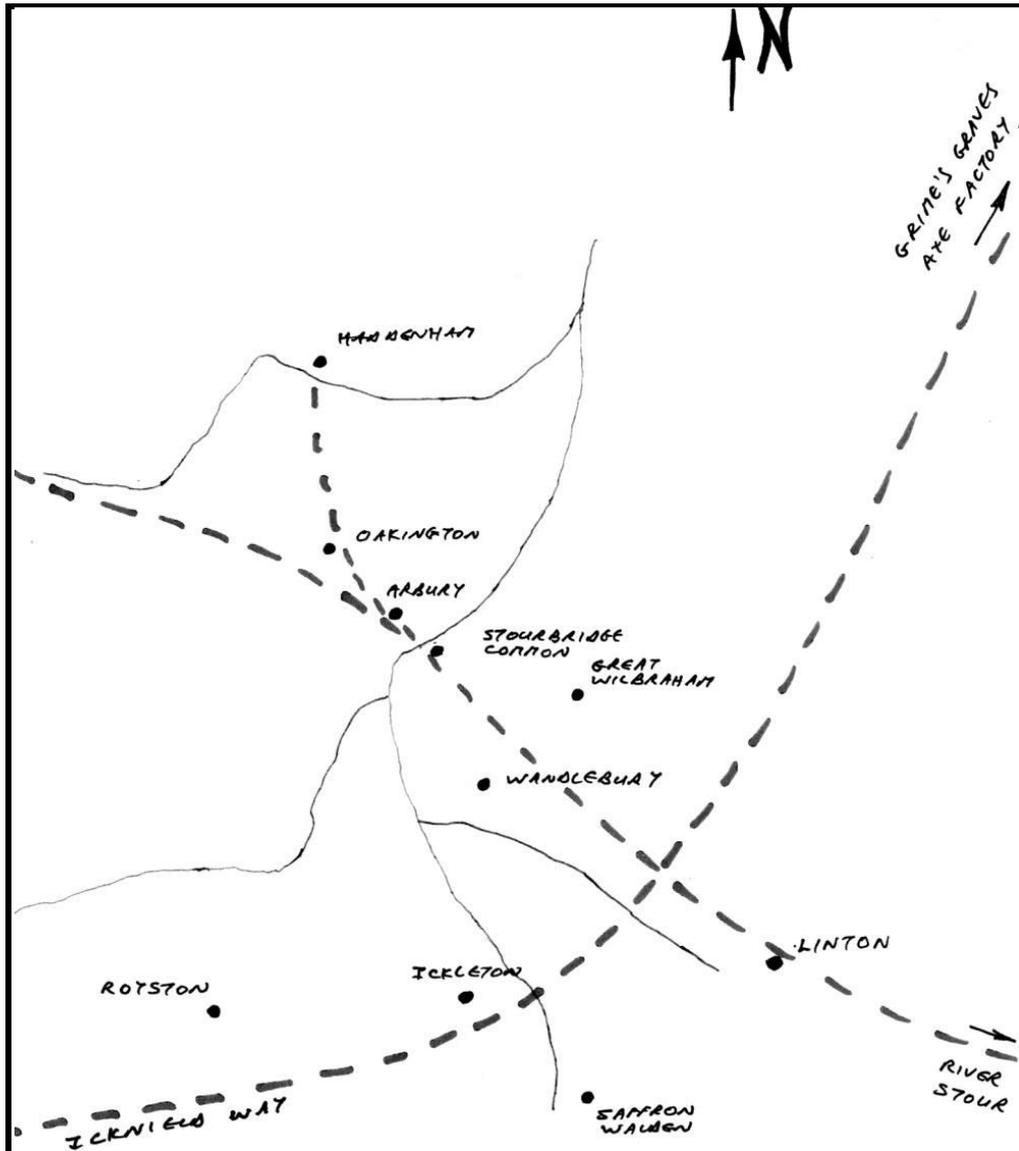
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Reprinted from Saffron Walden Historical Journal No 19 Spring 2010

Causewayed Enclosures are rare in England, with only about 60 known to exist, most of them in the south and south-east, but at least ten of these were clustered in the Cambridge area, including Saffron Walden, Ickleton, Linton, Wandlebury and Royston, all of them near the Ickneild Way.

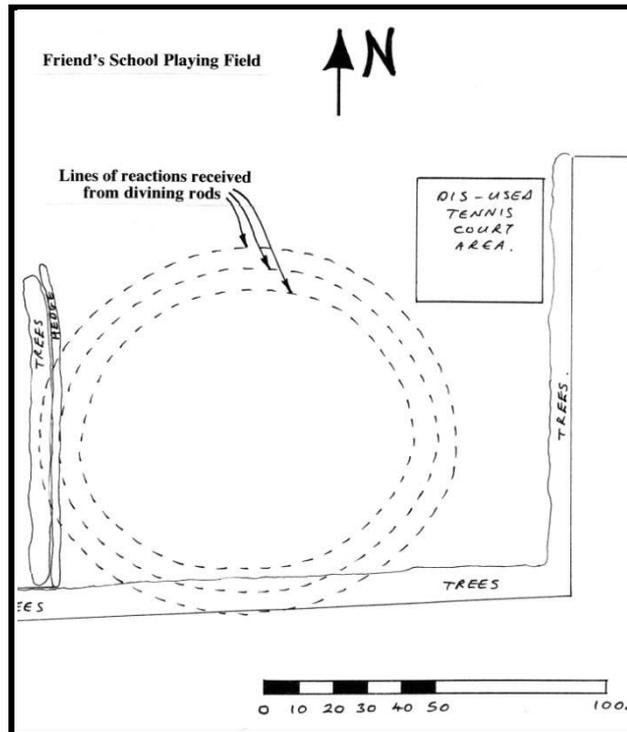
Causewayed enclosures are the earliest monuments built by man, at a time when they were changing from hunter-gathers to farmers, who began to settle into communities during the late-Neolithic period 5,000 years ago. As community places, one can only speculate on what they were used for, but it is quite likely that they would have been used for meetings, feasts, celebrations and possibly worship. It is quite possible that axes were traded at such sites, judging by remnants found at these locations. Stone axes were excavated on a large scale in factory-like conditions at Grimes Graves near Thetford in Norfolk. It is very likely that the ancient trackway, the Ickneild Way, which passes close to Cambridge on its ridge route leading towards the major Neolithic communities in Wessex, played an important part in the distribution of these flint axes around the country. Indeed the relative remoteness of the Grimes Graves axe factory probably meant that the causewayed enclosures near Cambridge played a key role in the trade of these axes around England, and possibly into Europe.

Causewayed enclosures were roughly circular ditches and banks, often 2-300 metres in diameter. They obtained their name from the way they were constructed. The ditches were dug as elongated pits, possibly by family or tribal groups, and between the next pit there was a small gap known as a causeway. The ditch was dug usually with antler picks and the shoulder-blades of deer, with the ditch on the inside of an outer bank. It was therefore not a defensive structure, and may have been used for keeping livestock in, particularly at night, and keeping predators out. The enclosures always had at least one entrance, which may have been closed off by dragging branches across the entrance.



Causewayed Enclosures in the Cambridge area.

Using dowsing rods, in 2008 I located the causewayed enclosure on the Friends' School playing field at Saffron Walden. The monument is about 110 metres north to south and 120 metres east to west, and would have consisted of a central platform surrounded by an inner ditch and an outer bank. The divining rods show that the ditch and bank were both about six metres wide, and therefore the ditch would have been about three metres deep, with the spoil forming a bank about three metres high. Unfortunately, due to disturbance of the site, geophysics has not been able to provide a clear result on this feature.



Destroyed causewayed enclosure on the Friends' School playing field, Saffron Walden.

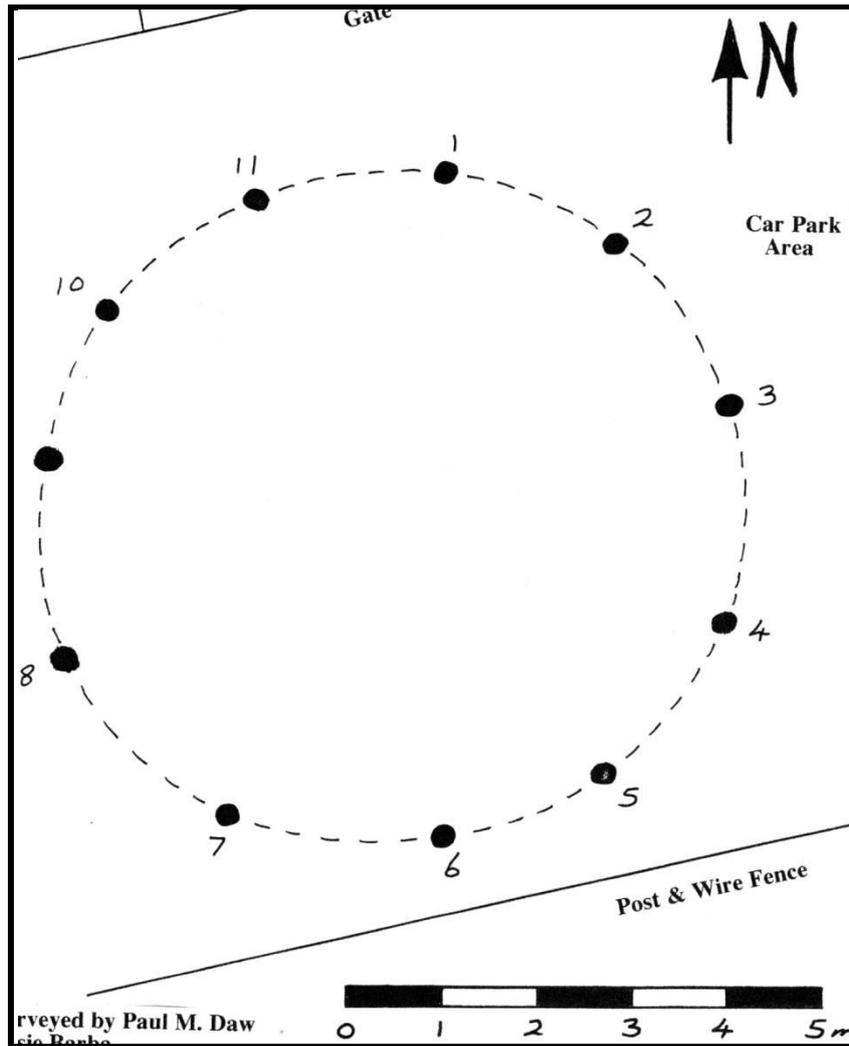
I have also located what I believe to be a similar sized causewayed enclosure near Coploe Hill to the south of Ickleton, and have worked with the Gog Magog Trust and English Heritage on one at Little Trees Hill, a few hundred metres west of the Iron Age hill fort at Wandlebury. There is another causewayed enclosure at Royston, close to the Ickneild Way, and I have also located a previously undiscovered causewayed enclosure in Oakington.

Stone Circles

There are almost 400 stone circles in England, all of them on the western side of the country, in the West Country, the Pennines and in Cumbria. Over the past ten years I have been visiting and photographing them, and have built up an archive of 3,000 photographs. With the divining rods I am able to locate the entire ring of stones at a circle, even if it has been partially or totally destroyed, and once I have marked out this ring with markers, I am then able to locate each stone position, and draw up a plan of each site.

In May 2009 I visited some Sarsen stones at the small village of Alphamstone on the Essex/Suffolk border, scattered about the churchyard of St Barnabas. When I walked around the perimeter, I detected ten predicted stone positions, which I recorded on a plan. This finding of a stone circle in East Anglia is unique, but I then found an internet reference to a possible stone circle at Littlebury in Essex, where there were a number of stones still scattered around the village.

'Causewayed Enclosures and Stone Circles' – *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 19 (2010)



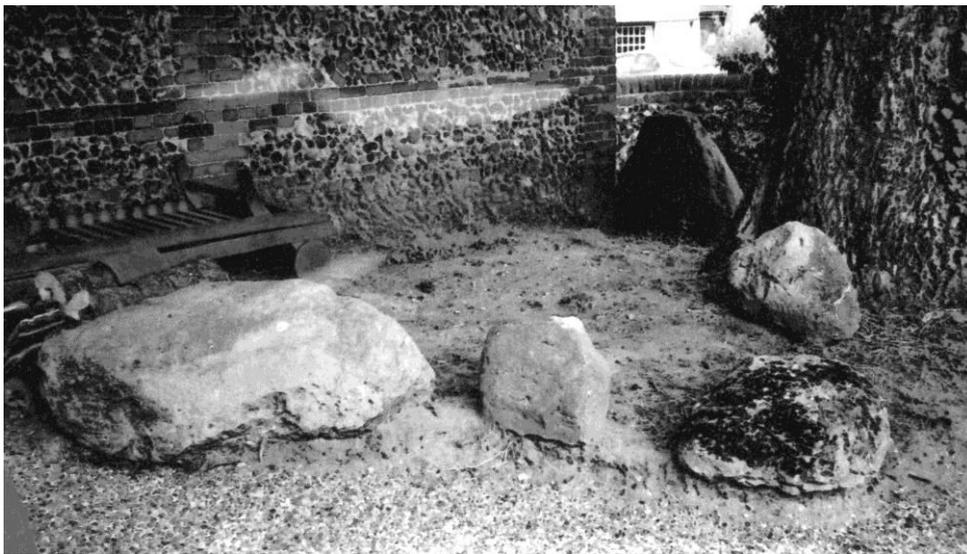
Stone circle at Littlebury.

I used a technique known as long-distance dowsing and in June 2009 located a circle in a car park in Church Walk. The circle measured seven metres north to south, and 7.4 metres east to west, and when I walked around the circle, I detected 11 predicted stone positions. I showed my discovery to the Littlebury Local History Recorder, Lizzie Sanders and her husband Brian, and to their surprise they found that they also used the divining rods successfully and obtained the same reactions on the site of the stone circle.

I had already located five stones and with the help of Lizzie and Brian Sanders, found another five stones in a garden, making ten stones so far. The Sarsen stone was moved, with Lord Braybrooke's permission, by Jabez Gibson to the garden of his new house in Elm Grove in Saffron Walden in 1828.

An aerial photograph shows a possible ring ditch or henge close to the River Cam to the south of Littlebury, which would have been constructed

at a similar time to the stone circle. About a mile to the west of Littlebury, near the junction with Chestnut Lane, is a large fallen stone, which may have been a marker, when standing, guiding the visitor from the axe trading route of the nearby Ickneild Way to the Neolithic settlements at Saffron Walden and Littlebury. The presence of a stone circle in this part of the country would have marked it out as a site of some importance. The stone circle would have been sited on common land in the middle of Littlebury, and would have been very close to an ancient line of stones at 1.5 km intervals from Wandlebury, via Strethall, Ring Hill, the 'Leper Stone' at Newport and elsewhere, ending at a henge site within Hatfield Forest.



Stones in a front garden at Littlebury.

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