



THE

NESSGLYPH

UNCOVERED

HANNAH
SACKETT

PAUL
REILLY



For
Rowan
and
Evie Wren

Nesscliffe Hill Camp,
Shropshire,
July 2021.

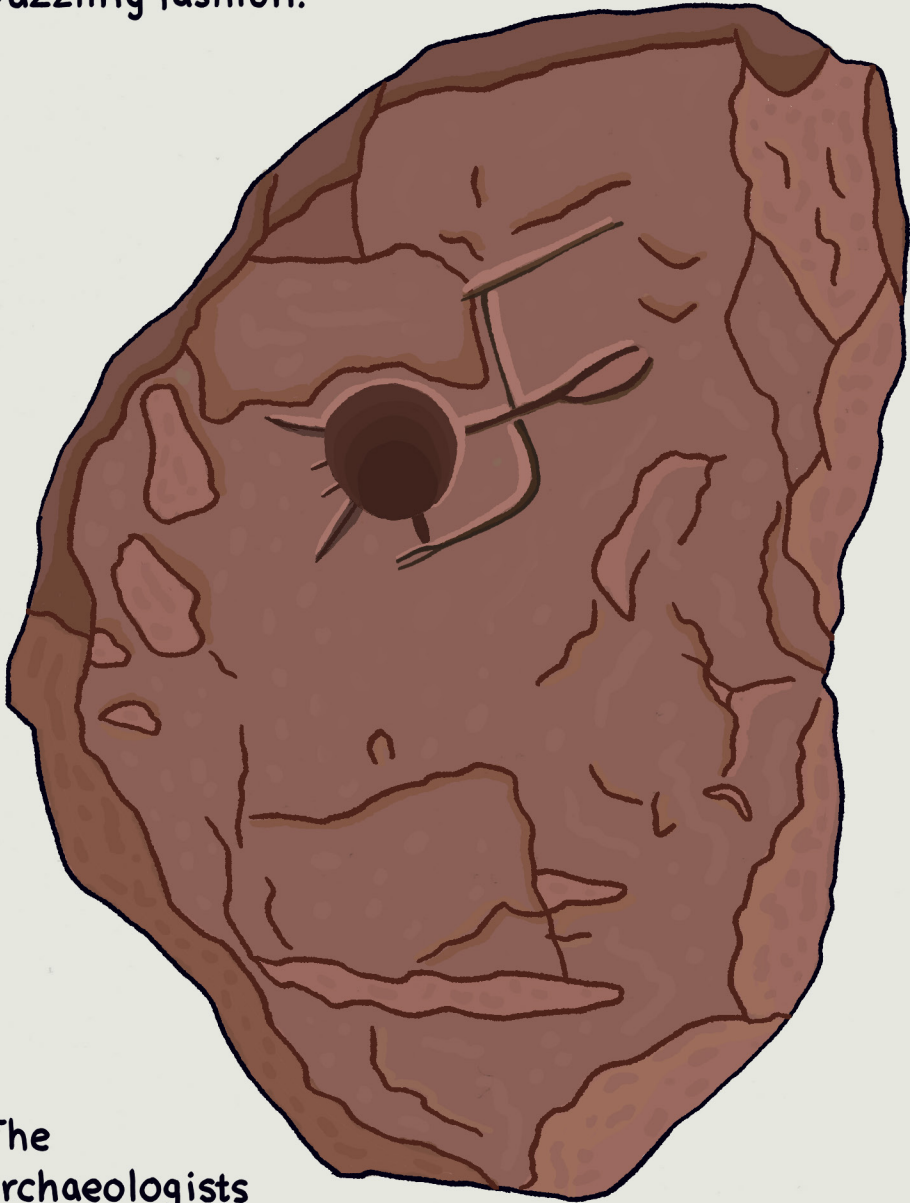


Archaeologists excavating a Middle Iron Age
hillfort* discovered...



*Today, Nesscliffe Hill Camp is a small hillfort made of massive banks and ditches that once enclosed a settlement. It was built around 2500 years ago.

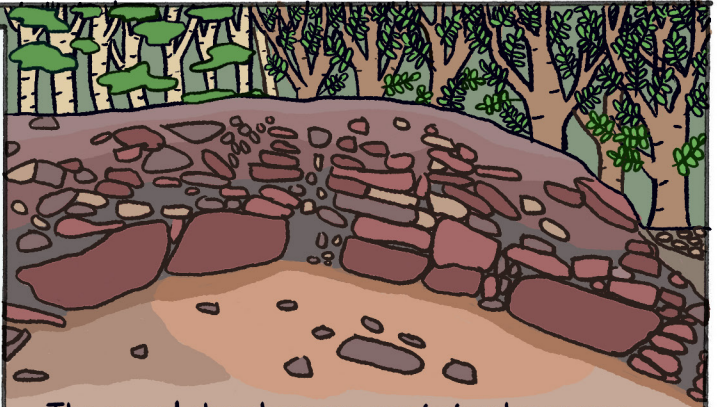
It was a block of sandstone carved in a puzzling fashion.



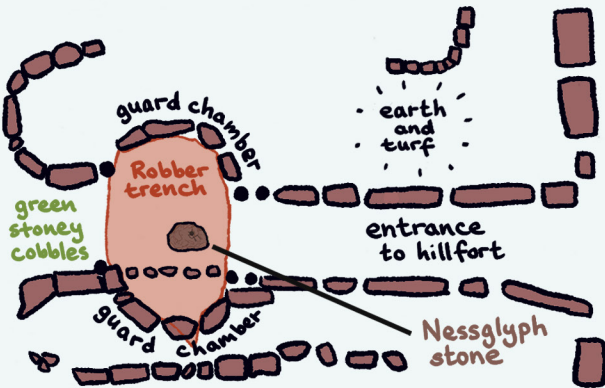
The archaeologists wanted to know more about it. They started to ask questions about the stone.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

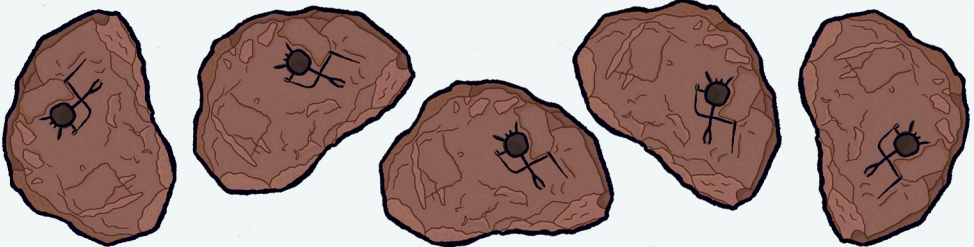
The carved stone was found in the middle of two guard chambers, at the entrance of the hillfort.



The guard chambers are semi-circular rooms, either side of the entrance way into the hillfort.



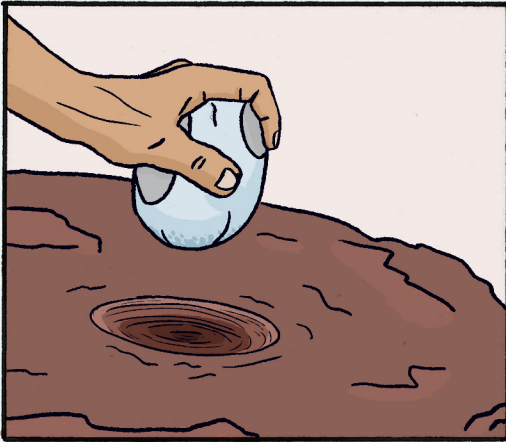
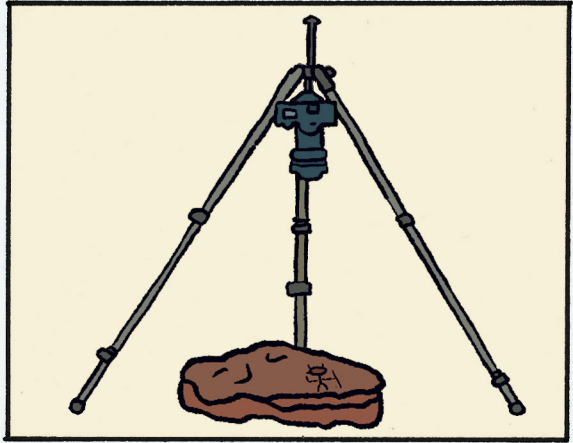
Sadly, the stone had been moved from its original location. It was found in the rubble left by an earlier excavation in the 1950s and by robbers in the 1970s.



Archaeologists could not be sure if the stone was once part of the wall. Or even which way up it should be.

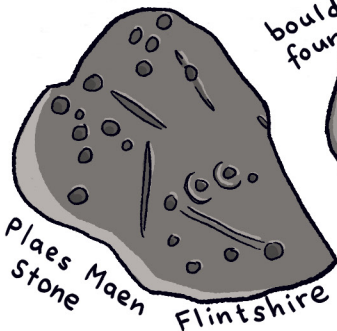
HOW WAS THE CARVING MADE?

The archaeologists scanned and photographed the stone. They discovered that it had been carved in two ways, at two different times.

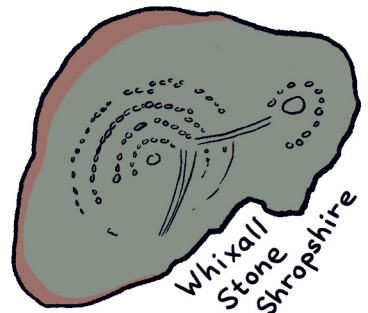


The circle had been ground using a hard stone pebble. This type of carving is called a cupmark. It dates from the Neolithic or Bronze Age. It could be around 4000 years old.

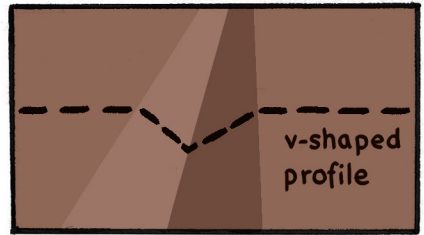
Cupmarked stones from the wider area include:



boulder found at Eddisbury hillfort



The straight lines in the carving had a V-shaped profile. They had been carved using metal tools. They had to date from the Iron Age - or later.



They could have been made around the time people built and first made use of the hillfort around 2500 years ago - evidence of metalworking was found at the site.

Fragments of crucible have been found at the site.



Crucibles were used for melting down small pieces of metal.

Or perhaps the carvings date from the Romano-British period around 1800 years ago, when people had reoccupied the hillfort.



Many pottery fragments dating from this period have been found at Nesscliffe.

The people who lived here at that time were known as 'CORNOVII' which means 'the horned ones'.

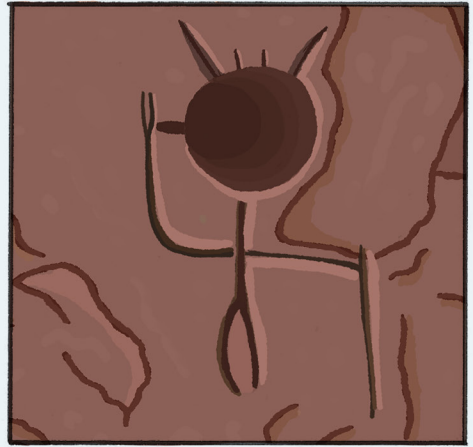
IS THE CARVING A PICTURE OF SOMETHING?

Archaeologists turned the carving around and around. This way up? Or this? Or this? Could it be a figure?

Like this?



Or this?



Do I have horns?

Horned figures are known from Iron Age and Romano-British objects, including rings, coins and stone carvings.



The Puckeridge Ring

Horned warrior
Bugh by Sands, Cumbria



Horned warrior god
Maryport, Cumbria

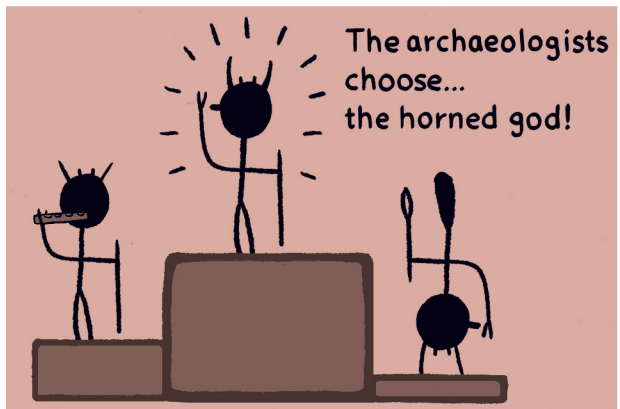
This stone has changed many times. It keeps changing.



Part of the Middle Iron Age hillfort around 2500 years ago - in the guard chamber, at the point where people moved from the outside to the inside of the enclosure.



Carved again in the Iron Age or Romano-British period.
Shaped to make:
A piper?
A horned god?
A hunter?





For centuries the stone lay long forgotten.

In the 1950s
and 1970s the
stone was excavated,
disturbed, displaced, and
left lying in the guard chamber
buried with rocks and rubble.

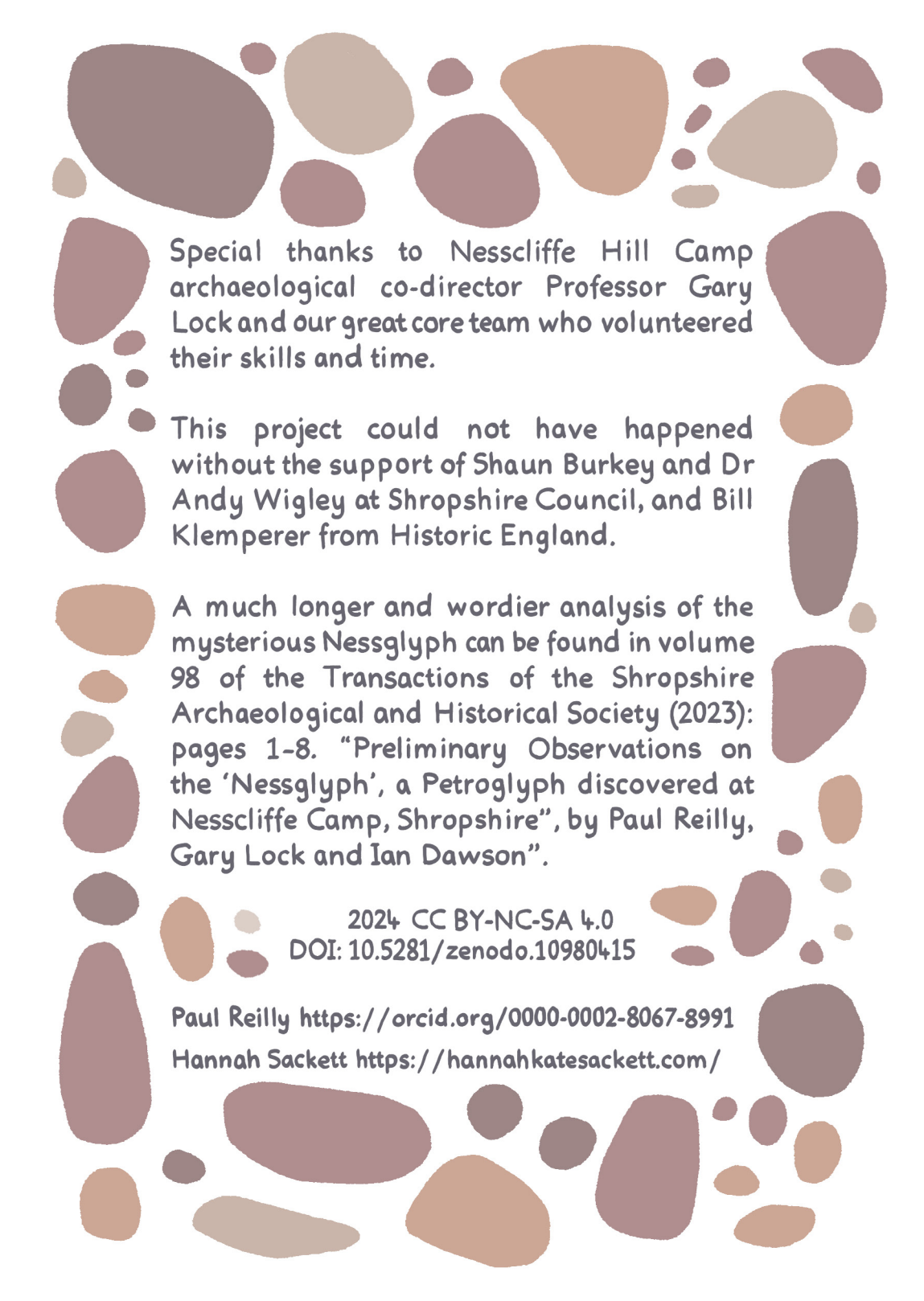
Now, rediscovered, it is an object to be wondered at,
discussed and debated.

The carving inspires new images, new artworks, new
ideas.

WHAT
WAS I?

WHAT
AM I?

WHAT WILL
I BECOME?



Special thanks to Nesscliffe Hill Camp archaeological co-director Professor Gary Lock and our great core team who volunteered their skills and time.


This project could not have happened without the support of Shaun Burkey and Dr Andy Wigley at Shropshire Council, and Bill Klemperer from Historic England.

A much longer and wordier analysis of the mysterious Nessglyph can be found in volume 98 of the Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society (2023): pages 1-8. "Preliminary Observations on the 'Nessglyph', a Petroglyph discovered at Nesscliffe Camp, Shropshire", by Paul Reilly, Gary Lock and Ian Dawson".

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Nesscliffe Hill Camp is a very rare and important Middle Iron Age hillfort (500 BCE). Until recently it was heavily wooded before storms uprooted many trees and inflicted great damage. Archaeologists, meticulously excavating parts of the damaged hillfort, have revealed the remains of a remarkable stone-faced entrance passageway, with guard chambers and gate posts, passing through the massive rampart and deep rock-cut ditch which enclosed the hill top. The hillfort was later occupied by Romano-Britons, who probably made the Nessglyph. We think it represents a god of a local tribe called Cornovii (the horned ones) by the Romans.

Facebook: Nesscliffe Camp
Instagram: nesscliffehillcamp
X (Twitter): @NesscliffeHill1

For more information on the archaeology of Shropshire visit <https://shropshirearchaeologyhistory.org/links/>. To learn more about the many hundreds of hillforts in Britain visit <https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk> (Nesscliffe Hill Camp is entry 0076)