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Publisher: Routledge  
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## Archaeological Journal

Publication details, including instructions  
for authors and subscription information:  
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Published online: 11 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: R. H. Soden Smith M.A., F.S.A. (1870) Notice of Circles of Stones in the Parish of Crosby Ravensworth, Westmoreland, *Archaeological Journal*, 27:1, 200-203, DOI: [10.1080/00665983.1870.10851485](https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1870.10851485)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1870.10851485>

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NOTICE OF CIRCLES OF STONES IN THE PARISH OF  
CROSBY RAVENSWORTH, WESTMORELAND.

By R. H. SODEN SMITH, M.A., F.S.A.

IN Crosby Ravensworth parish, Westmoreland, my attention was recently called by the Rev. G. F. Weston to a circle of stones, or rather traces of three concentric circles, such as are commonly known by the name of "Druid circles," and respecting which a few notes and measurements, made with the assistance of H. F. Church, Esq., a member of our Institute, may be of some interest.

I am the more urged to put on record what we observed on account of the risk to which all such ancient monuments in outlying and comparatively unfrequented districts are exposed from the ignorance of the inhabitants. In the parish of Ashby, immediately adjoining, a road-contractor permitted his workmen to commence breaking up the stones composing a large and fine cairn, and the whole would have been destroyed and carted off had it not been for information given to Mr. Weston, who promptly appealed to the owner of the land and had this act of Vandalism stopped—not, however, I regret to say, until about one-third of the structure had been demolished.

The circle to which I now propose to call attention is situated in the south-east corner of the parish of Crosby Ravensworth, within a short distance of Ashby parish. It stands on the south-west slope of a hill, at an elevation of about 1,000 feet above the sea-level, on a wild rocky moor or sheep-walk, and as it may be well in inquiries of this nature to take some note of the character of the rocks in the district, I may mention that the circle of stones rests on what is known as the Orton Scar limestone, the surface of which crops up in many places through the meagre covering of shallow soil. Above this, higher on the hill, appears a narrow stratum of yellowish sandstone; this sandstone

weathers to a hard surface, and is known by the workmen in the neighbourhood as bastard freestone ; beyond, and overlying it in a northerly direction, are strata of a hard blue limestone, locally known as winter tarn limestone, and beyond that again is a belt of clay shale.

The stones composing the circles, as well as the outlying structures presently to be mentioned, are all sandstone derived from the stratum, which, as we have seen, crops out higher up the slope of the hill, distant about 115 yards, but they rest almost immediately on the beds of natural limestone rock.

The stones have all fallen or been thrown down, but do not appear to be much displaced, each from its original standing-spot. They are generally not above 2 ft. 6 in. in length, unhewn and quite irregular in form, so that it would be scarcely possible to know the exact posture in which each originally stood. There appear, however, to have been three concentric circles, the outer about 60 ft. in diameter, according to the most accurate measurement we could make, the inner about 30 ft. The stones have stood close together, and it is difficult now to discriminate between those composing the various circles, or to state precisely what was the original number of the whole. Some, half-buried by the soil and weathered in the lapse of ages, can scarcely be distinguished from what may be mere fragments ; the smaller stones, moreover, are mingled with those that appear to have been used in supporting the larger erect pieces that especially composed the circles. Perhaps about 150 of the larger size have been employed in the structure of the concentric circles.

In the centre are some stones remaining, rather smaller than the outer ones, but similar in material, and also irregular and undefined in form ; no order is traceable in their arrangement, and they appear to have been displaced and perhaps broken ; they do not now present the appearance of design such as is recognizable in the position of the central stones of other circles existing in this neighbourhood.

A line of fallen stones stretches away from the edge of the outer circle up the hill, in a N.N.E. direction, for a distance of 112 yards, and at present terminates in a large flat piece of sandstone of irregularly angular form, 6 ft. long by 4 ft. 7 in. at the larger end, and 2 ft. 10 in. at the smaller.

This line of stones seems to have been originally composed of a double row, standing up like those composing the circles, and thus they would have defined or edged a long narrow path, perhaps 3 or 4 ft. wide, leading to the circle.

Besides this remarkable line of stones, which, to the best of our observation, certainly seems to be of the same character of structure and period as the circles, there is, in an easterly direction, at the distance of 10 yards from the latter, a small group of stones at present irregular and apparently disarranged. Also, at the distance of about 9 yards, in a S.E. direction, is another small group of similar stones, disarranged, but still, like the former, distinguishable as an artificial structure by their position, as well as by the nature of the stone—sandstone, which, as I have already observed, must have been carried to its present site from its native beds in the hill some distance higher up.

Whatever may have been the purpose of these small outlying groups of stones, they appear to have some relation to the circles, and are, in all probability, the work of the same people and period. I have not found in the other remarkable circles which I have had the opportunity of examining with Mr. Weston in the same district, any indication of such outlying groups, nor of the long line of stones stretching away from the circles.

I may mention, however, that Dr. Stukeley says that he saw, in 1725, at Shap, a temple formed on the design, as he describes it, of the circle and serpent; and he alludes to another at Classernish, in the island of Lewis.<sup>1</sup>

I need scarcely remind antiquaries that such lines of stones in connection with circles, on a very grand scale indeed, exist at the great monument at Carnac in Brittany, and did exist at Avebury in Wiltshire. If there be any analogy between this ancient circle, with its connected structures, and the vast and notable works to which I have alluded, the interest of this almost unknown monument in Westmoreland is greatly increased. I have not had the opportunity yet of studying the Carnac remains. Judging from plans and descriptions of them, and from what I was able to observe in a

<sup>1</sup> Itin. Curiosum, Iter Boreale, p. 42. A circle of stones, forming a portion of the great avenue at Shap, was destroyed in 1844, during the construction of the

Lancaster and Carlisle Railway. It has been described and figured in the Gentleman's Magazine, vol. xx., N. S., p. 381.

recent visit to Avebury in Wiltshire, there would appear to be a relation of origin, design, and workmanship between this lesser structure and the gigantic labours of the forgotten race who reared perhaps Carnac, Avebury, and Stonehenge.

Besides this circle there are numerous other remains of interest in the same district; a circle at Gunnerkeld in Shap parish, a circle in Orton parish, a circle at Oddendale,—a smaller circle now intersected by a wall on Shap Common.<sup>2</sup>

Various tumuli exist within a small circuit in Crosby Ravensworth and neighbouring parishes. We opened two of these. In one, which had no doubt been disturbed previously, we found a few fragments of bones and some human teeth, with bones and teeth of rats; in the other, on Gathorn Plain, was a kist-like structure of rough, flat stones, but we found no remains of any kind.

<sup>2</sup> In the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. iv. p. 443, may be found notices of circles of stones at Gunnerkeld and Gamelins, and also of various remains of the same description near Shap, by the Rev. James

Simpson, an antiquary to whom we are indebted for a valuable memoir on the Antiquities of Shap, read at the meeting of the Institute at Carlisle, and published in this Journal, vol. xviii. p. 25.