

STONE CIRCLES

A stone circle is a monument of standing stones arranged in a circle. Such monuments have been constructed across the world throughout history for many different reasons. with over 1000 examples still surviving to this day, including famous examples like Avebury, the Rollright Stones and Stonehenge. Another prehistoric stone circle tradition occurred in southern Scandinavia during the Iron Age, where they were built to be mortuary monuments to the dead. Outside of Europe, stone circles have also been erected, such as the Bronze Age examples from Hong Kong.

Dates and archaeology of European Megalithic stone circles:

All experts agree that stone circles are of pre-Christian date, but beyond that stone circles have proven difficult to date accurately. [Radiocarbon dating](#) has produced a wide range of dates at different sites. This is at least partly due to an inadequacy of materials suitable for radiocarbon dating that can be reliably obtained from the sites. The diversity of radiocarbon evidence may also suggest that stone circles were constructed over a very long period, or were sometimes reconstructed at later dates. It is often not clear when building started. A further obstacle to dating is that there are generally no other archaeological artifacts associated with the stone circles. 'Traditional' archaeological artifacts, such as pottery shards, bones, etc., are not often found at the sites, and when found are frequently of a later date than the associated stone circle.

The sites display no evidence of human dwelling, and rarely encompass graves. This suggests that stone circles were constructed for ceremonies (perhaps religious ceremonies) and were in use on ceremonial occasions only. The type of ceremonies (if any) is entirely unknown. An alternative hypothesis is that they were a form of [amulet or talisman](#), i.e., an entity acknowledging and appeasing supposed spirits dwelling in nature, meaning that their ceremonial use was secondary to their talismanic value, or equal to it. The crudeness and variety of the stones excludes the possibility that they had astronomical observation purposes of any precision. Sometimes a stone circle is found in association with a burial pit or burial chamber, but the great majority of these monuments have no such association. A stone circle is an entirely different entity from a [henge](#), and different also from an isolated [monolith](#), yet sometimes these other types of ancient stone monuments are found in close proximity.



VARIANTS

Concentric stone circle

- A concentric stone circle is a type of prehistoric [ritual](#) monument consisting of a circular or oval arrangement of two or more stone circles set within one another. They were in use from the late Neolithic to the end of the early Bronze Age and are found in England and Scotland.

Recumbent stone circle

- Recumbent stone circles are a variation found throughout the British Isles and [Brittany](#). They are a form peculiar to the north east of [Scotland](#) and south west Ireland ([Drombeg stone circle](#) near [Glandore](#) and [Rosscarbery](#), Co. Cork). Recumbent stone circles date back to approx 3000 BC.

DISTRIBUTION

British Isles

- There are approximately 1,000 stone circles and 80 stone [henges](#) in Britain and Ireland. The French archaeologist Jean-Pierre Mohen in his book *Le Monde des Megalithes* says: "British Isles megalithism is outstanding in the abundance of standing stones, and the variety of circular architectural complexes of which they formed a part...strikingly original, they have no equivalent elsewhere in Europe — strongly supporting the argument that the builders were independent."
- Often oriented on sight lines for the rising or setting sun, it is possible that, for their builders, the cycle of seasons was very important.
- The largest stone circle in Britain is at [Avebury](#), the second largest stone circle is the Great Circle at [Stanton Drew stone circles](#), and the [Ring of Brodgar](#) contains the third largest stone circle in Britain.

Continental Atlantic Europe

- On the European continent, there are several examples in [Brittany](#): two on the island of [Er Lannic](#) and two more suggested at [Carnac](#). The [Petit Saint Bernard](#) circle lies further afield, in the French Alps. They are also known as [harrespil](#) in the [Basque country](#), where villagers call them [mairu](#)-baratz or [jentil](#)-baratz that means "pagan garden (cemetery)", referring to [mythologic giants](#) of the pre-Christian era.

AVERBURY

"it does as much exceed in greatness the so renowned Stonehenge as a cathedral doeth a parish church"



Stonehenge

- Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument in the English county of Wiltshire. One of the most famous sites in the world, Stonehenge is the remains of a ring of standing stones set within earthworks.



ROLLRIGHT STONES

consists of 3 main sites standing

King's Men :

77 stones in a small 31 metre [stone circle](#) of heavily weathered and eroded limestone with possibly an entrance to the north. It is believed to date from the late [Neolithic](#) to early [Bronze Age](#) period of 2500-2000BC.

King Stone :

This 2.5 metre stone stands on the other side of the road to the north, it seems probable that the King Stone is the youngest of the monuments at Rollright.

Whispering Knights :

A [burial chamber](#) , this is the oldest monument at the site with a suggested construction date of 3800-3000BC.