

What's Happening in Masonry

by: Gary Porter



Stonehenge

Being a mason contractor and having respect for all the effort that goes into constructing a building today, one can appreciate the history of how things were built in the past. From a time when there were no cranes, forklifts, even the wheel was not invented yet! How did these people from the ancient world move stones that weighed from 4 to 40 tons or more and transport many of them from a quarry over 200 miles away.

Back about 5,000 years ago, somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 BC, a formation of large rocks was assembled, built with some HUGE pieces of stone called Stonehenge. *I have provided pictures of this structure if you have never seen this.* There are many mysteries behind this site and many theories as to how it was constructed, but there are still unanswered questions regarding how these huge pieces of stone were assembled, what they mean and who did the work.



Stonehenge is located in southern England. Its purpose is controversial, but most modern scholars believe Stonehenge was a burial ground. It may have had other uses but no conclusions have been drawn at this time. Construction took place over 1,500 years? The construction is somewhat a mystery as sandstone slabs forming the outer ring the largest stones, probably came from local quarries while scientists have traced the bluestones, stones around 4 tons, that make up the inner ring from Preseli Hills in Wales, some 200 miles from where Stonehenge sits on Salisbury Plain.

Stonehenge (cont.)

According to one longstanding theory, Stonehenge's builders fashioned sledges and rollers out of tree trunks to lug the bluestones from the Preseli Hills. They then transferred the boulders onto rafts and floated them first along the Welsh coast and then up the River Avon toward Salisbury Plain, or, they may have towed each stone with a fleet of vessels. More recent hypotheses have them transporting the bluestones with supersized wicker baskets or a combination of ball bearings, long grooved planks and teams of oxen.

Another theory is that the stones were not moved by people or rafts towed by oxen, but carried by glaciers over several years. Many large stones have been repositioned in this manner.



Several theories exist on who built Stonehenge. One is a tale of King Arthur. This mythical account of English history was considered factual well into the Middle Ages. Stonehenge was considered the handiwork of the wizard Merlin. In the mid-fifth century, the story goes, hundreds of British nobles slaughtered by the Saxons and buried on Salisbury Plain. Hoping to erect a memorial to his fallen subjects, King Aureoles Ambrosias sent an army to Ireland to retrieve a stone circle known as the Giants' Ring, which ancient giants had built from magical African bluestones. The soldiers successfully defeated the Irish but failed to move the stones, so Merlin used his sorcery to spirit them across the sea and arrange them above the mass grave. Legend has it that Ambrosias and his brother Uther, King Arthur's father, are buried there as well.

Stonehenge (cont.)

One problem with this account of who built Stonehenge is that construction predates the time of Merlin. There are other hypotheses attributed its building to the Saxons, Danes, Romans, Greeks or Egyptians. Yet another theory of who built Stonehenge is that of the Celtic high priests known as the Druids. However, radio carbon testing has proved that Stonehenge existed 1,000 years before these priests existed, ruling them out as the builders.

Many modern historians and archaeologists now agree that several distinct tribes of people contributed to Stonehenge, each undertaking a different phase of its construction. Bones, tools and other artifacts found on the site seem to support this hypothesis. The first stage was achieved by Neolithic agrarians who were likely indigenous to the British Isles. Later, it is believed, groups with advanced tools and a more communal way of life left their stamp on the site. Some have suggested that they were immigrants from the European continent, but many scientists think they were native Britons descended from the original builders.

No one is sure of the significance or function of Stonehenge. It may have been a burial ground, it may have astronomical significance, but did people of that time know anything about astronomy? It may have been a healing place due to recent British archeological finds of bones and human remains. Additionally, bluestones were thought to have healing powers.

Despite not knowing how it was built, by who and what significance it really has, Stonehenge is one of the most famous and recognizable sites in the world. Stonehenge draws more than 800,000 tourists a year, many of whom also visit the region's numerous other Neolithic and Bronze Age marvels.