

# Avebury



Avebury is the largest stone circle in Europe, and is both a traditional English village and a World Heritage Neolithic monument. Construction of the site began c 3000BCE (English Heritage, 2009), while other significant archaeological sites such as round barrows, long barrows, hill forts and Silbury Hill, that comprise and give shape to the ancient Avebury landscape were constructed over a period of time from c 3500 BCE until the Iron Age. The Neolithic population that constructed Avebury Henge had left the area without any trace before the Celtic Druid priesthood had come to Britain. Hutton reports that there is only one reference in literature in which the Druids, 'are actually portrayed in Britain (or at least right next to it)', (Hutton, 2007, p.3). In the early 60s CE the Romans massacred the Druids on the island of Anglesey, virtually ending Druidism in Britain; the first modern Druid order was founded in 1772 (Hutton, 2007, p.21).

Avebury village first appeared on the site of the Neolithic temple between 500-600 CE as a Saxon settlement (Panayi, 2009), and an early wooden Saxon church was constructed c 1000 CE (Wiltshire Council, 2009) . From the time of its construction Avebury remained virtually untouched until two destructions took place; the first in 1320 CE, followed by a period of destruction during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wheatley & Taylor, 2008, p.7). In the 1930s, an archaeologist and marmalade millionaire, Alexander Keiller, bought Avebury and much of its surrounding landscape. A period of restoration began which continued after World War two.



William Stukeley c. 1740

Avebury is in a unique position; it is a small village set within an ancient stone circle. The community is comprised of secular elements and followers of various religions, the most visible of which are Christianity and Paganism. The church spire dominates the village and from each road approaching Avebury, huge sarsen stones stand like sentinel gate keepers. The church spire is an obvious religious icon, impressing its identity onto the village, while the Pagan presence is more subtle, made visible by the occasional gathering of Druids or other Pagans. Avebury is also a World Heritage site and is periodically host to thousands of visitors who also comprise of secular tourists, Pagan worshipers, Christian tourists, archaeologists, authors and media and university researchers ... and astrologers conducting a tour of our distant and mysterious past.

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Notes:

- Hutton, R., 2007, *The Druids*, Hambledon Continuum.
- Panayi May, *Avebury Stone Circle and Silbury Hill*,  
<http://www.history.uk.com/articles/index.php?archive=57>, sourced, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009
- Wheatley, M, Taylor, B, 2009, *Avebury: Sun, Moon and Earth*, Wessex.
- Wiltshire Council, <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getchurch.php?id=11>,  
sourced 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009.



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