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An Introduction to the Study of Henges: Time for a Change?

Alex Gibson

Abstract

This paper summarises 80 years of 'henge' studies. It considers the range of monuments originally considered henges and how more diverse sites became added to the original list. It examines the diversity of monuments considered to be henges, their origins, their associated monument types and their dates. Since the introduction of the term, archaeologists have often been uncomfortable with it. It was introduced in inverted commas and those commas continued to be used for over 30 years. With the introduction of the term 'hengiform' the strictures of definition that characterised the monument class collapsed and an increased variety of circular and oval monuments were included under the henge aegis. It is suggested here that the term 'henge' has outlived its usefulness as we no longer know what we mean by it. Instead we should adopt an objective viewpoint and recognise these earth circles as just one manifestation of the tradition of circularity that pervades the third and second millennia BC.

Keywords: Henge, Earth Circle, Stone Circle, Timber Circle, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Ritual.

Introduction

The problem with henges is that archaeologists no longer know what they mean by the term. The term has become increasingly applied to a variety of sites that now go far beyond the strictures that were originally defined. It is an understandable problem because, since the time of Kendrick and Hawkes, a considerable variety of circular sites have been discovered through aerial survey and geophysical prospection. Many of these circular sites date from the middle or later Neolithic and we can now generalise that in the last quarter of the fourth millennium BC, the inhabitants of Britain became fixated with circular and oval enclosures of earth, wood and stone. The ubiquity of the circle from such a fairly precise chronological horizon clearly points to shared (or at least related) cosmologies throughout Britain and Ireland which persisted, though perhaps with modification, for almost two millennia. Henges, timber circles, stone circles, ring-ditches, kerb cairns, disc barrows, ring cairns, penannular enclosures, causewayed ring ditches, palisade enclosures, enclosed cremation cemeteries, stake circles, round barrows and round cairns encapsulate this focus on circularity and there are clear relationships, similarities and shared grammatical constructs within these monuments but what now constitutes a henge?

Origins of the term – previous work

When Kendrick (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932) defined the term 'henge monuments', he used inverted commas around the word 'henge' throughout the chapter devoted to the phenomenon. He stated at the outset (Chapter VII) that 'under this rather curious heading I am going to group a number of prehistoric 'sacred places' which I cannot, or dare not, sort out into period chapters' (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932, 83). He admits that the name is derived from Stonehenge and Woodhenge (Figure 1) the two sites that head the list but it must be remembered that even the name 'Woodhenge' was derived from its better-known lithic neighbour and was an appellation that grew as the excavations progressed and the complexity of the site was gradually revealed. During this process, the overall similarity to the layout of the stones at Stonehenge was recognised and prior to the excavations the low-mounded site had been known as 'the Dough Cover' (Cunnington 1929). This derivative labelling continues to be used, so in the popular press, Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Powys) was named the Welsh Woodhenge, a palisade barrow around a buried tree stump at Holme-next-the-sea in Norfolk was christened Seahenge as befitted its present (but not



FIGURE 1: STONEHENGE AND WOODHENGE. THE TWO SITES THAT HEADED KENDRICK'S LIST.

original) environment and another ‘Wooden henge’ has been discovered by the recent geophysical survey of the Stonehenge environs. This latter misuse of the term betrays the apparent complexity of the site comprising as it does one ring (possibly 2) of pits, a causewayed ring ditch and a barrow.

Kendrick was at once apologetic for ‘coining the phrase’. He admitted that ‘some readers may not approve of my including as members of the same family certain apparently empty ‘rings’ and ‘stone circles’. He goes on to say that the interpretation of these sites as meeting places or temples is not unequivocal and nor are they necessarily of one date, but rather they are unified in being round, not primarily for burial, and ‘belong, as far as it is possible to tell, either to the late Neolithic period or the first half of the Bronze Age’ (Kendrick and Hawkes, 1932, 83). Included in the subsequent description are Stonehenge and Woodhenge, The Sanctuary (notably with no ditch), Avebury, Durrington Walls, Dorchester (Oxon), Eyam Moor stone circle (Derbs), Porlock stone circle (Somerset), two ditched enclosures at Hengwm (Gwynedd), the Ysceifiog barrow (Flintshire) and he further refers to Elgee’s description of ‘ceremonial’ and ‘burial’ circles in east Yorkshire – which is confusing given that he has already stated that henges were not primarily associated with burial. The chapter is not comprehensive, however, concentrating as it does on documenting recent interventions rather than offering a corpus of sites.

From the outset, therefore, even to the originators of the term, ‘henge’ was an unhappy monumental category. It was not confined to earthwork enclosures (The Sanctuary was included) but rather it was loosely defined and consequently applicable to a large number of diverse monuments from ditched enclosures, timber circles, stone circles and elements of round barrows. But despite the instability of this foundation, it has formed the basis for numerous theoretical archaeological pyramids.

Four years later, in his report on the excavations at Arminghall (Norfolk), Grahame Clark, in looking for ‘the affinities of the monument’ published a list and distribution map of monuments that he considered comparable (Clark 1936). Clark was the first to define the monument class properly as

‘a well-known class, possessing certain easily defined features. At the centre of all of them is a more or less circular area on which stand stone or timber uprights..... The central area is defined by a bank, and, where the material for this can more easily be quarried from the ground, by a ditch; as a general rule the ditch is placed within the bank, and where there are two ditches the inner one is normally the larger. Access to the central area is given by a single or often by two opposite entrances; where there is a ditch, the entrance is represented by an unexcavated causeway. (ibid 23, my emphasis).

Clark regarded the internal ditch and external bank arrangement as a crucially defining feature and furthermore the presence of internal settings of stones or posts was also one of the fundamental characteristics of a henge. This said, however, the main sites listed in Clark’s text are supplemented by an additional appendix of sites of similar shape where no internal features have been recognised including sites such as Durrington Walls (before discovery of the timber circles), Thornborough Rings in N Yorkshire and King Arthur’s Round Table in Cumbria. On his distribution map, Clark records 20 probable ‘henge’ monuments (he too continues to use the term in inverted commas) amongst which are the Stripples Stones in Cornwall and Brodgar and Stennes in Orkney. Clark also acknowledges that ‘within this class of monuments...there is scope for many variations in detail’ (ibid, 23). He describes, for example, the variations in ditch form – internal at Arbor Low (Derbyshire), none at Mayburgh (Cumbria), external at Stonehenge (Figure 2). At once the loose definition is loosening further.

When discussing function, Clark is at pains to point out the considerable amount of labour that must have been invested in some of these sites: the quarrying of the large ditch at Avebury, the transportation of the stone to Stonehenge and the felling of the massive oak posts at Arminghall and Woodhenge would have involved a great deal of effort. They were therefore sites of importance to those who constructed them. He concludes that internal ditches were not overtly defensive and the sites were therefore used for ritual or ceremonial and he concurs with St George Gray’s amphitheatre hypothesis that the banks may have served as viewing platforms with the spectators denied physical access to the interior by the ditch (Gray, 1935). He did not want to speculate further regarding prehistoric religion but felt that the sepulchral evidence had been exaggerated and that some burials, such as that of the infant with split skull at Woodhenge, may have been dedicatory. Regarding date, Clark considers the Peterborough Ware from below the bank at Avebury to act as a *Terminus Post Quem* for the bank and refers to Peterborough Ware and Beaker in the ditch. Rusticated Beaker was, of course, found on the floor of the inner ditch in his own excavations at Arminghall. A barbed and tanged arrowhead from the base of the Arbor Low ditch was similarly invoked to suggest a Beaker date. Gorse Bigbury (Somerset) produced Beaker pottery from the ditch and he also commented that ‘there is a suspicion that Durrington Walls belongs to the same period’ (Clark 1936, 30). This ‘suspicion’ is doubtless attributable to Farrer’s 1917 excavations through the bank at Durrington Walls where, beneath the bank and in a layer of charcoal, a fragment of pottery identified as Beaker was found. The sherd has since been lost but Farrer’s description of the sherd’s fabric and combed cross-hatching certainly seems to support the Beaker identification made for him by Cunnington and Blackmore (Farrer 1918, 100).

In 1938, Piggott considered the dating of these sites, albeit not in great detail. He linked the stone circles and henges with his ‘Groove Ware’ (sic.) and Beaker groups

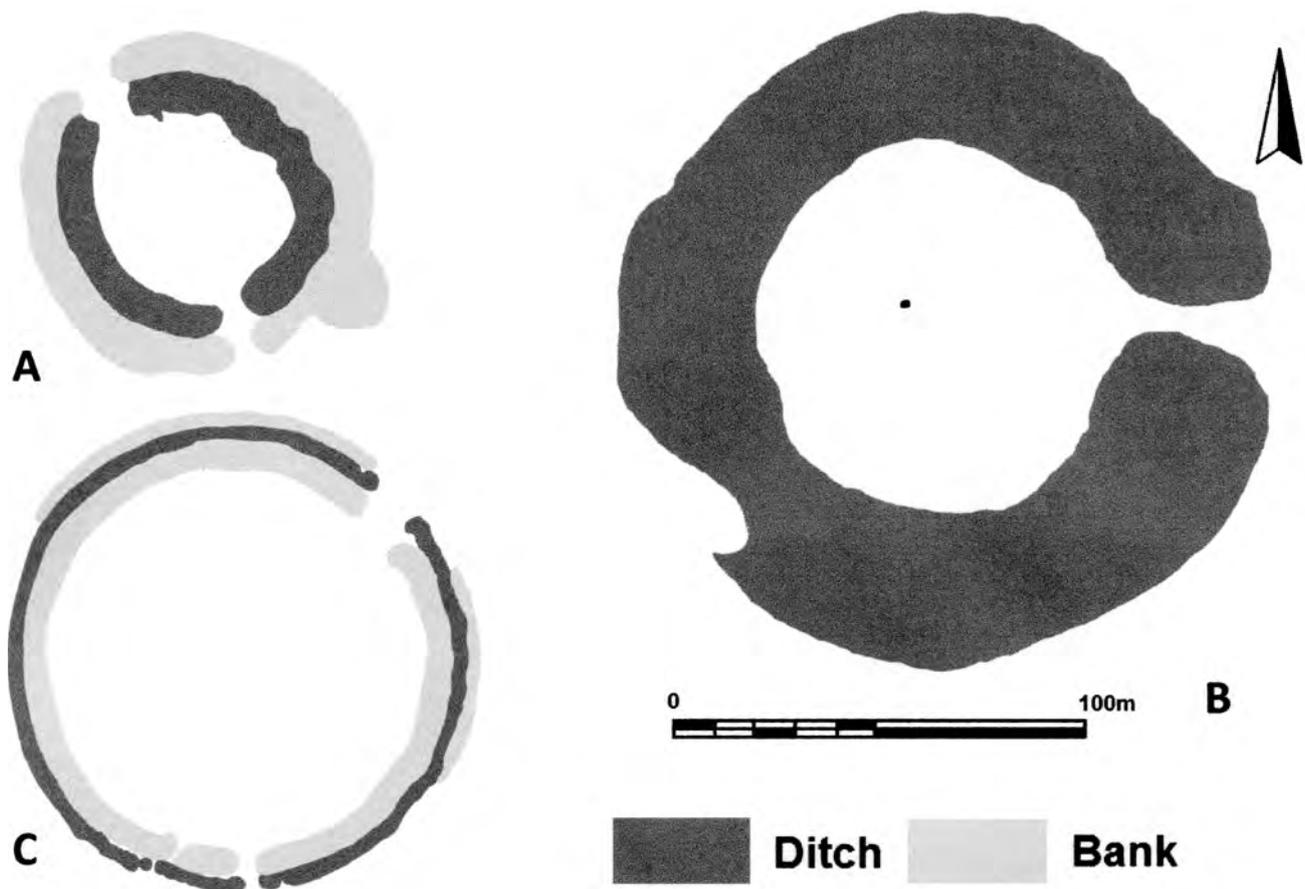


FIGURE 2: DIFFERENCES IN DITCH POSITION. A – ARBOR LOW, DERBYSHIRE. B – MAYBURGH, CUMBRIA. C – STONEHENGE, WILTSHIRE.

and he sees the monuments as ‘essentially the product of a lowland culture with a relatively soft subsoil enabling encircling ditches to be dug with ease’ (Piggott 1938, 57). Consequently stone circles, were upland phenomena where ditch-digging was more difficult but where orthostats were abundant. Arbor Low and Avebury were seen as a fusion of the two traditions. This observation was later taken up by Burl (1969; 1976).

A year later, Stuart and Peggy Piggott described the stone and earth circles in Dorset (Piggott and Piggott 1939). In this work they distinguish two sub-groups of henges on entrance alone and in particular whether they have one or two. Once again ‘henge’ is in inverted commas as if no-one has yet come to terms with the label. We are also informed that the first sub-group, with one entrance, tend to have their entrances to the NE while the two-entranced henges are orientated NW-SE (ibid, 140). They reiterate that henges are a lowland phenomenon, perhaps related to ‘the A Beaker people from Holland and the Rhineland’ while the stone circles represent a highland phenomenon perhaps allied to the Breton origin of the ‘BI Beaker folk’ (ibid 141).

Piggott’s two sub-types were adopted by Atkinson in his co-authored report on the excavations at the Dorchester

on Thames (Oxon) cursus complex (Atkinson *et al.* 1951). Here the excavation of a variety of circular enclosures provided the opportunity for Atkinson to deliver an up to date synthesis and overview of the type. Atkinson actually suggested that ‘the term “henge monument” is redundant’ (Atkinson *et al.* 1951, 81) as only Stonehenge could be proved unequivocally to have had a ‘hanging’ (i.e. lintelled) structure. He nevertheless decided to retain the name as a convenient way of avoiding ‘cumbrous definition’ or ‘insufficiently specific’ words such as ‘Sanctuary’. An external bank, internal ditch and 1 or 2 entrances were Atkinson’s defining features of henges: he rejected continuous ring banks and free-standing stone and timber circles.

According to his definition, Atkinson listed 36 sites that could reasonably claim to be henges, 13 belonged to Class I, 17 to Class II and 6 to the new Class IIa (Atkinson *et al.* 1951, 94-5). Atkinson added the Class IIa sub-division to describe henges with double entrances and double ditches flanking a central bank. There was no similar sub-division of the Class I type despite the well documented double ditches of Arminghall. Atkinson also identified 5 dubious examples amongst which were Marden and Durrington Walls. Furthermore, he noted that whilst Class II and IIa henges were found across the size range (ibid, 85, Fig 27),

Class I tended to be under 400ft (122m) in diameter. By virtue of the artefacts found in the few excavated examples, Atkinson concluded that the Class I henges were earlier than Class II. Excavations at Class I henges had produced middle Neolithic pottery as well as Grooved Ware and artefacts traditionally held to be later Neolithic such as skewer pins and transverse arrowheads. Beaker, of course, had been found in comparatively large quantities at Gorsey Bigbury but to date no mature Bronze Age finds had come from Class I henges. Class II monuments, however, had a tendency to Beaker and Bronze Age associations (Food Vessel at the diminutive Fargo Plantation, Wiltshire). Avebury, despite having 4 entrances, was included in Class II and tentatively associated with 'A-Beaker'.

The orientation of the entrances of henge monuments was also analysed as part of Atkinson's study and he concluded that Class II and IIA monuments had no common orientation but only a tendency towards a NW-SE axis whilst the entrances of Class I monuments avoided the SW-SE arc.

In his review of the Dorchester excavation report, Clark (1954) was unhappy with Atkinson's use of the word 'henge'. Clark still used the name in inverted commas and explained that 'the term "henge", first applied generically to a class or family of analogous monuments, has stuck because it seems to characterise in a word a well-defined category of monument. The fact that on strictly etymological grounds the term 'henge' can only be applied to Stonehenge itself is irrelevant so long as we are all agreed what we mean to apply by it....The leading formal elements of 'henge' monuments have been generally understood to comprise: (a) a central, more or less circular area supporting stone or timber uprights; (b) a bank, and, where material for this was obtained by excavation, a ditch, which was normally, though not invariably, inside the bank; and (c) one or two entrances giving access to the central area through bank and, where present, ditch' (Clark 1954, 91).

Given this reiteration of his original definition, Clark suggests that none of the Dorchester sites are henges as first and foremost they lack uprights. 'Scale is not a criterion on which one would necessarily care to lay much stress in making formal comparisons, but it is surely significant that, if we exclude the site in Fargo Plantation which equally lacks the feature of an interior structure, the Dorchester sites are all substantially smaller than the smallest recognised 'henge' monument' (ibid 92). He goes on to say that Atkinson's report's great achievement was in bringing to light a *new* monument type to British Neolithic studies and he issued the 'plea' that 'this should not be obscured by referring the new monuments to a well-defined category, a leading feature of which they so conspicuously lack' (ibid 92). Interestingly, Clark then noted the similarity of some of the Dorchester sites with Stonehenge I and in consequence suggests that the Dorchester circles may therefore be the progenitors of the henge *sensu stricto*. In other words, Atkinson had

extended the original definition to include many of the middle and later Neolithic circular forms with which we began. Clark's observation fell largely on deaf ears and the loosening term was soon to be completely unravelled.

In 1967, following his work at Priddy Circles, Somerset, Tratman added a further 15 henge sites to Atkinson's corpus. Two years later Burl could list 78 henges as defined by Atkinson 'a roughly circular bank with one or more entrances' and he regards Clark's insistence that these should enclose internal structures as 'an attractive but misleading hypothesis' (Burl 1969, 3). Burl nevertheless is uncertain about including Fargo Plantation and some of Atkinson's Dorchester sites in his corpus. Fargo Plantation is a burial site, possibly borrowing from henge architecture whilst the Dorchester circles may better be seen as 'cremation cemeteries quite possibly ancestral to the Wessex henge-tradition'. This can be taken further and given the presence of internal ground-surface cremation deposits surviving in this heavily ploughed environment, it may be suggested that the interiors had been protected for a considerable time, perhaps by an internal mound. Burl was the first to look at henges in detail, describing associations, distribution, size, outlying stones, internal portal stones or posts, internal timber structures, internal pit circles, internal stone circles, burials and orientations. He recognised eleven regional groups and he also defined the term 'circle-henges' for those that combined the respective earthwork and megalithic elements of henges and stone circles.

Also in 1969, following his excavations at Durrington Walls, Wainwright undertook a review of henges. Benefiting from the increase in the use of aerial photography in archaeology, but ignoring Clark's criticisms that have already been described, he was able to add 31 sites to Atkinson's 1951 corpus but he also introduced a new word to the archaeological literature: 'hengi-form' - a word that has been widely used, mis-used and even abused since. He refers to some 'hengi-form' sites recently photographed from the air in Scotland (Wainwright 1969, 116) and describes some of the Dorchester sites as 'not true henges but rather of hengi-form type' which is a tacit admission that the typology advocated by Kendrick, Clark, Piggott and, to a lesser degree, Atkinson has now broken down. It is a compromise between Atkinson's descriptions of the Dorchester sites and Clark's critical review. Wainwright defines 'hengi-form' sites as those which have henge characteristics but are less than 100ft (c.30m) in diameter. He includes in this group the small Class I enclosure at City Farm, Hanborough (Oxon) (Case *et al.* 1965) and the diminutive Class II enclosure at Fargo Plantation (Figure 3). He further proceeds to include other upland variants such as the enclosed cremation cemeteries of southern Scotland and northern England and here the picture starts to become really confused.

Wainwright identifies some of the small enclosed cremation cemeteries being excavated in northern England and Southern Scotland as 'hengi-forms'. At Whitestanes

Moor in Dumfriess Scott-Elliot and Rae had excavated a turf-covered stone bank with an internal diameter of 30ft (9.1m) (48ft (14.6m) overall) which enclosed 8 cremations, 1 with a Bronze Age cup (Scott-Elliot and Rae 1965). The excavators labelled their site as an enclosed cremation cemetery and never mentioned the ‘henge’ (or even henge-form) word preferring to find parallels for their site elsewhere in Scotland and in the Northumberland excavations of Jobey (see below). Meanwhile Radley was excavating similar sites in the Pennines and in particular a site at Brown Edge on Totley Moor another ‘henge-form’ according to Wainwright. The Brown Edge site comprised an earthen bank surrounding a flat area with a central cairn covering cremations associated with Collared Urns. ‘The ring-work is related in general form, function and age to other earth circles, cairn circles and stone circles found in the Pennines and elsewhere’ (Radley 1966, 1). Radley went on to consider that ‘the ring bank with a central cairn is comparable to the true Wessex disc barrow, lacking only the ditch’ (Radley 1966, 22). Radley goes on to suggest that comparable Pennine sites but having entrances ‘produce a form reminiscent of a henge or ...pond barrows which have entrances’ (ibid).

Jobey was also resisting temptation to link some of his Northumberland sites to henges. In his excavations at Alnham, Jobey (1966) described a small double-entranced enclosure (Cairnfield A, burial 3) with internal ditch and external bank (Figure 3). The ditch was no more than 3ft (0.9m) wide and 1ft (0.3m) deep and had probably enclosed a low, robbed central mound. From the 18ft (5.5m) diameter central area, a flint scraper and a fragment of jet, possibly from a cup, was recovered hinting at its Bronze Age date. Jobey compared this site to the Class II “henge” (sic) form but he did this only tentatively

preferring instead to use comparisons with the Roxburgh Saucer Barrows.

There is no doubt that some of these sites bear *superficial* similarities to classic henge ditch and bank morphology but in extending his definition to henge-form, away from the intention of the original term, Wainwright has opened up the label ‘henge’ to encompass any circular or oval earthwork of putatively Neolithic or Bronze Age date and, like Burl and Atkinson before him, he has dispensed with the need for internal structures, one of the defining characteristics of the original definition.

In 1971, Catherall proposed a new classification for henges and offered an insight as to their origins acknowledging that the complexity of the class appears to increase with excavation. Catherall classified the sites by their internal arrangements recognising that this limited the classification to excavated examples however he felt it unlikely that further excavation would increase the range of internal features. He proposed a six-fold classification based on internal elements: A – circles of pits, B – timber structures, C – stone circles, D – central structures, E – central burials and F – portal stones and posts. There were hybrid forms therefore Balfarg, with its portal stones, stone and timber circles and its central burial might be a B/C/E/F hybrid. Atkinson had already suggested that single entranced henges (Class I) were, in the main, earlier than the double entranced types (Class II) and Catherall’s scheme broadly supported this hypothesis although his Class F monuments were exclusively single entranced. Associated ceramics also broadly supported a type A – F progression with Mildenhall and Impressed wares associated with types A-C and Bronze Age ceramics associated with types C-F. Catherall followed Clark (1954)

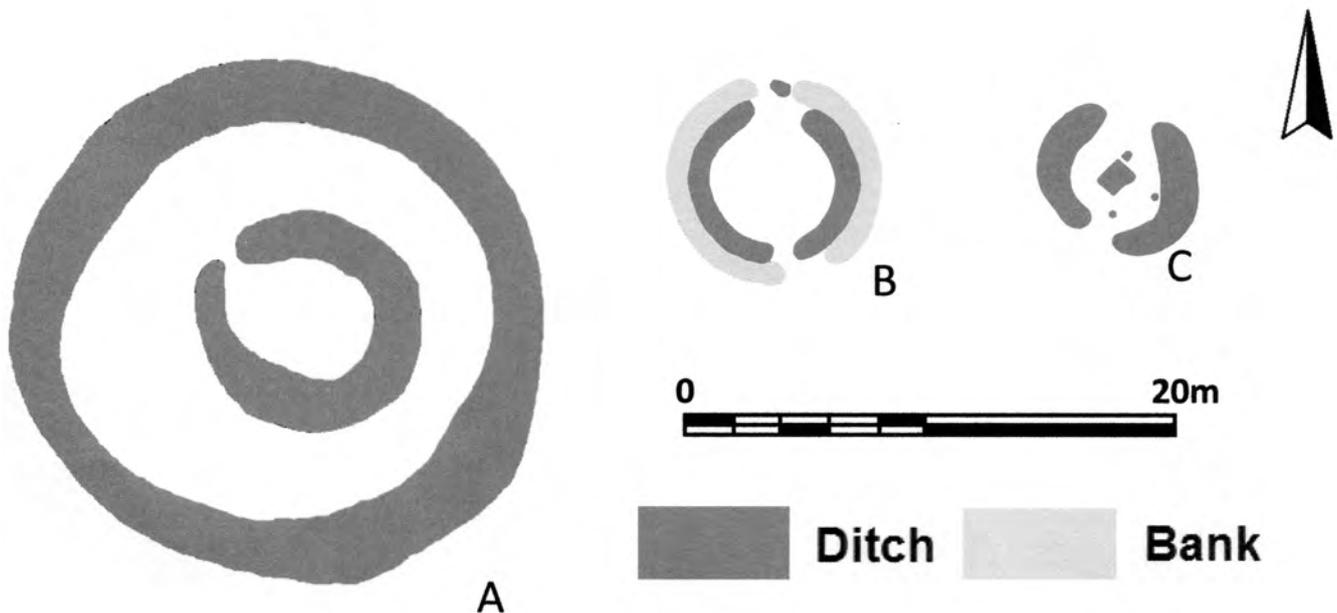


FIGURE 3: ‘HENGIFORMS’. A – CITY FARM, HANBOROUGH, SITE 4, OXFORDSHIRE. B – ALNHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND. C – FARGO PLANTATION, WILTSHIRE.

by suggesting that the circular cremation cemeteries at sites such as Dorchester, Stonehenge I and possibly also Cairnpapple Hill may be contenders for the origins of henges, the broad contemporaneity of these earlier sites reinforced by the bone skewer pins found with the cremations. He further disagrees with Atkinson (Atkinson *et al.* 1951) who regarded the ditches of henges as purely quarry ditches providing material for the all important bank and instead proposes that the ditches may have had a non-utilitarian function and, again based on Dorchester, that the causewayed ditches may well be an early feature ultimately derived from Causewayed Enclosures.

In 1986, following on from his 1973 thesis, Clare attempted to straighten the tangle that henge and hengiform terminology had become. Clare proposed to dispense with the idea that internal uprights should form a distinguishing characteristic of these sites but rather 'it is...the perimeter to which the features belong which forms the primary characteristic of these sites previously called henges' (1986, 282). He outlines the confusion between henges and ring-ditches and concludes that 'we are not dealing with a clear-cut monument type but a permutation of practices and features....' (*ibid.*). Using a system of matrix analysis in his comprehensive review, Clare concluded that 'there is no clear distinction between those sites previously called "hengens" and those described as "hengiform" (*op. cit.* 283). This conclusion is reiterated in his concluding section (*ibid.* 307) where he also makes the observant remark that while the perimeters are important they 'may have been added to an existing site': a conclusion that is becoming increasingly apparent in recent excavations (see below).

Clare's follow-up article in the following year examined the possible origins of his henge and hengiform classes. Clare points out that not only do henges share some features with causewayed enclosures, but that they also share features with earlier Neolithic 'mortuary enclosures' (another

unsatisfactory label) and that henges and hengiforms often occur in proximity to (sometimes actually enclosing) these earlier sites (Figure 4). He sees henges and hengiforms developing out of a 'milieu or nexus' of sites and traditions (1987, 468).

Clare considered a large number of morphologically similar sites and an impressive range of variables in order to attempt to bring order out of classification chaos. It was a brave and useful attempt to disentangle and re-order the henge problem but it did not meet with universal acceptance (Barclay 1989). Barclay felt that a stricter definition of the term henge was needed. He felt that Piggott's first separation of the monument type into class I and II depending on the number of entrances was 'still the most useful' (1989, 260). Other monument types (stone circles, ring-ditches, ring-cairns etc) doubtless had 'complex relationships' with henges proper enjoying similarities of architecture, sepulchro-ritual deposition and even site histories of modification, but these acknowledged similarities still did not make a ring-ditch a henge.

Meanwhile, in 1987, Harding and Lee had published their assessment of henges based largely on excavation and aerial photographic data (Harding with Lee 1987). Their pictorial and descriptive catalogue is still invaluable to anyone interested in henge monuments and its critical approach to the aerial photographic evidence did much to put henge studies back on track. Harding and Lee reinforced Atkinson's definition as a circular or near circular monument defined by a ditch within a bank and with one or two entrances and attribute many of the then (and now) current problems of classification to the fact that 'many current writers broaden the classification...to include sites that would formerly have been excluded' (*op. cit.* 12). They go on to discuss the problems of interpretation based purely on morphology, especially regarding class I henges and point out that many single-entranced internally ditched enclosures may have an agricultural function and

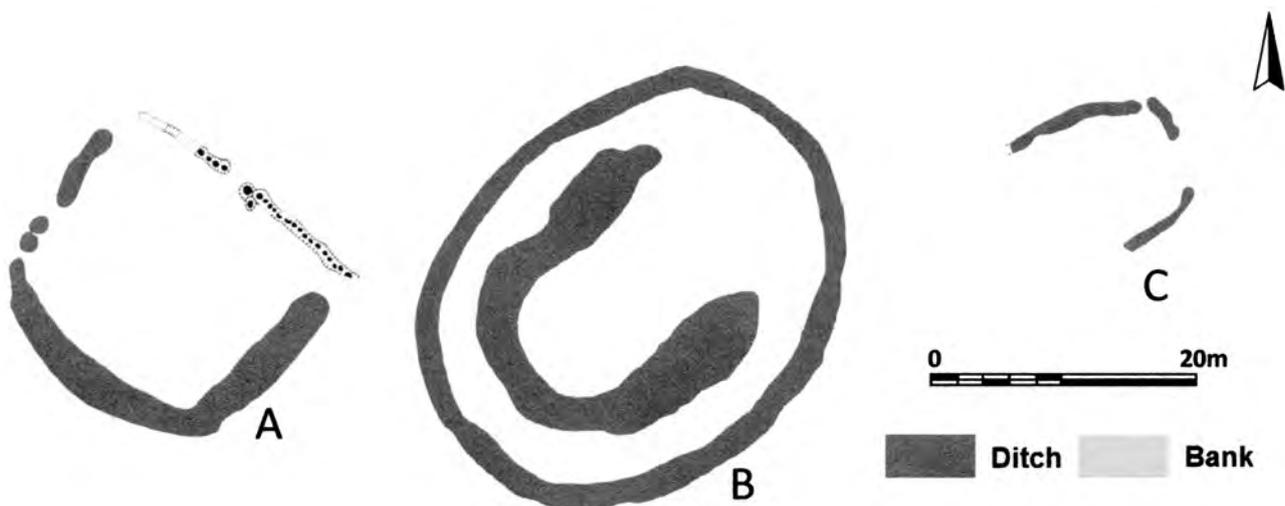


FIGURE 4: NEOLITHIC 'MORTUARY ENCLOSURES'. THE ORIGINS OF HENGES? A – GRENDON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE. B – HORTON, MIDDLESEX. C – ALDWINCLE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

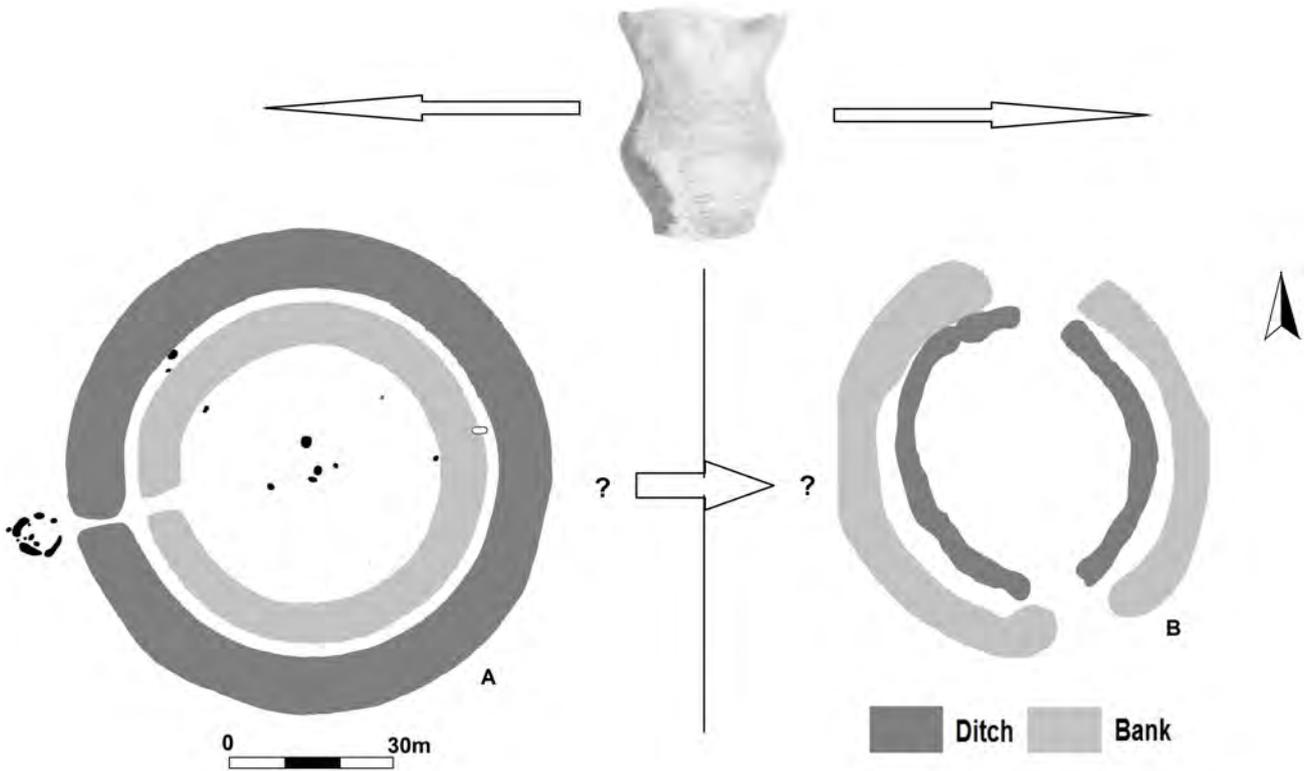


FIGURE 5: ATKINSON'S HYPOTHETICAL SCHEME FOR HENGE DEVELOPMENT AND CHRONOLOGY. CLASS I PRE-DATE BEAKER, CLASS II ARE BEAKER OR LATER. CLASS I MAY HAVE INFLUENCED CLASS II. A – LLANDEGAI A, GWYNEDD. B – CAIRNPAPPLE HILL, WEST LOTHIAN.

be very much later than the Neolithic or Bronze Age (for example Roman signal stations, hut circles and post mills).

By such strict adherence to Atkinson's original definition, Harding and Lee reduced the corpus to 22 'classic' excavated sites and 20 slightly excavated or unexcavated 'classic' sites. The large Wessex henges they termed 'henge-enclosures' while the smaller sites with henge-like characteristics they termed 'mini-henges'. They also recognised other related circular forms such as segmented ring-ditches and ring-cairns but avoided the use of the term 'hengiform' (though it does creep into the gazetteer). When discussing scale, and using the internal diameter as the most frequently available measurement (as opposed to crest to crest of ploughed-out banks) they suggest that 14m is the cut off point between classic and mini-henges and that single entrance henges tend to be slightly smaller than the double entranced ones as originally noted by both Atkinson (*et. al* 1951) and Burl (1969). Similarly ditch width should be over 2.5m in classic henges. The next major synthesis was that of Jan Harding in 2003 who very much followed Harding with Lee's typology of mini-, classic and super-henges.

The origin of henges

Such was the concern as to what a henge actually was or which features defined a henge of whatever type, few archaeologists attempted to look at the origins of the class. Clark (1936, 31-2) suggested that the wooden elements

of henges might come, with the Beaker Folk, from the palisade and post-circle barrows of the Low Countries but he also pointed out that the chief Dutch investigator of such phenomena, Albert van Giffen, was of the opinion that the Dutch barrows were themselves influenced by British henges. A discussion of British and Dutch timber circles below barrows suggested to Clarke that the jury was out as to which influenced which. Clark went on to examine Callendar's (1927) hypothesis that stone circles were derived from cairn peristaliths and suggested that it may be that the 'stone "hengens"' (may be) ancestral to the wooden ones' (1936, 36). Without an absolute chronology at his disposal, however, Clark was forced to admit that 'we are left with two hypotheses (Dutch palisade barrows and the British Megalithic tradition) and in the present state of knowledge it is difficult to choose between them. Fortunately this is not necessary; we are not writing one of these synthetic works wherein all difficulties must be resolved....' (1936, 39, my brackets).

Atkinson (1951, 93) was not convinced by either theory. He started with the generally accepted theory that class II henges were Beaker in date and if so, they must be a native manifestation of the Beaker culture as they lacked direct parallels in Europe. However Class I henges had either produced pre-Beaker artefacts or had produced Beaker from secondary contexts. Class I henges might therefore be the influence for the Class II monuments (Figure 5). As for the origins of the Class I sites, that was 'no less obscure than the origins of the communities to which they

belong' (1951, 96). As mentioned above, Clark (1954) saw the Dorchester sites not as henges *sensu stricto* but, given their Neolithic associations, perhaps as the progenitors of the henge tradition.

Wainwright favoured the roughly circular forms of Causewayed Enclosures as the progenitors of henges (1969). Neither Causewayed Enclosures nor henges were permanently settled but rather appeared to have been visited seasonally when rituals involving feasting, burial and deposition took place though the evidence for feasting and ritual was scant at henges. Burl (1976, 25) followed Wainwright to a degree. He noted the connection of Causewayed Enclosures and henges with stone axes suggesting that one may have replaced the other as meeting places for exchange and social discourse. The earliness of Llandegai A (see below) and the perfect Group VI axe from beneath the bank might argue for an origin in areas close to axe production.

Harding and Lee consider the potential contribution of the growing number of central European enclosures of the post-LBK Lengyel and Rössen cultures (now known as *Kreisgrabenanlagen*) as possible influences however their dating now suggests that they are earlier than henges by as much as a millennium and that they appear to have been comparatively short-lived phenomena associated, in central Europe with the appearance of the Lengyel culture c. 4900-4500 cal BC (Daim and Neubauer 2005; Melichar and Neubauer 2010). It remains a possibility that some of these *Kreisgrabenanlagen* may still have been visible as earthworks or functioned as important locales for a considerable time after their construction and it may be that the shared circularity and, to a lesser extent, astronomical alignments between these sites and British henges may be common responses to shared or similar beliefs however the difference in time and space between the central European and British phenomena make any direct relationship unlikely.

Harding and Lee, like Wainwright and Burl, regard Causewayed Enclosures as more likely precursors of henge monuments citing the discontinuous ditches, the treatment of these ditches and the placed deposits within them and in the interiors. There are differences, of course, and the 'domestic' material at Causewayed Enclosures is certainly more abundant than it is at henges. Some henges lie close to Causewayed Enclosures and may have taken over their roles as meeting places however the similarities in both form, site-history and distribution are general rather than specific and they conclude that there is 'little ... that suggests a background specifically in Causewayed Enclosures' (Harding with Lee 1987, 59). They further look to Neolithic round barrows and cite Duggleby Howe, North Yorkshire, with its encircling causewayed ditch. They also see a formative phase for circular monuments perhaps evolving from Mortuary Enclosures and interrupted ring ditches of the Neolithic though rarely do these possess the scale of construction found amongst henges. Instead Harding and Lee look to a variety of circular monuments

such as pit circles and post circles below barrows as equally influencing henges. They conclude that 'no one source can provide an adequate background for all the features represented on them (i.e. henges)' (*op. cit.*, 61, my brackets). Clare (1987) largely supported this view also drawing attention to Neolithic mortuary enclosures as mentioned above.

Indeed Causewayed Enclosures, and in particular those with internal fences or palisades may well have influenced the emerging class of middle and late Neolithic Palisaded Enclosures. These represent a considerable increase in scale from the Causewayed Enclosure stockades and involve the felling of considerable numbers of mature oak trees. Starting in the last few centuries of the fourth millennium cal BC they continue through the later Neolithic, the early examples pre-date henges and they are often found in association with them (Gibson 2002; Brophy and Noble, this volume). The largest so far discovered, at Hindwell, Powys, encloses a staggering 34ha, is three times the area of Durrington Walls and probably involved the felling of a minimum of 1400 mature oak trees.

Jan Harding (2003) did not look so much towards the Continent or indeed the Earlier Neolithic for the origins of henges but preferred to see the emergence of a series of circular enclosures which he termed formative henges. He benefitted from an increased radiocarbon chronology and saw sites with early dates such as Stonehenge I, Llandegai A and Stennes (all Class I henges) as being formative. Stonehenge and Llandegai A were also unusual in having external ditches. The ditches around megalithic tombs and Neolithic round barrows such as Maes Howe, The Giant's Ring at Ballynahatty, Co. Antrim and Duggleby Howe are also cited as possible atypical and therefore formative henges. Flagstones in Dorset with its late fourth millennium radiocarbon dates, its interrupted ditch, its circular form and incorporation of human burials may, with Stonehenge, link formative henges to Causewayed Enclosures and suggest 'a continuity between the late fourth and early third millennium BC' (2003, 13). To these may be added the Thames Valley sites such as the Neolithic penannular ring ditches at Shepperton (Jones 2008), Horton (Preston 2003) and Imperial College Sports Ground (Barclay *et al.* 2009) with their irregular ditch profiles, human burials and association with Impressed Ware. With radiocarbon dates spanning c.3600-3300 cal BC these sites are earlier than Stonehenge I and may be related to the early monuments at Dorchester. Harding goes on to suggest that the emergence of the circular tradition may represent a fundamental change in religion away from ancestor cults represented by multiple burials and long mounds to more individual burial and different monument forms. This seems to have taken place at the end of the fourth millennium.

Burrow also favoured the idea of formative henges in his review of the Welsh and western English material (2010) and once again noted a sepulchral connection in the earlier monuments. Like all other commentators, Burrow suffers from the paucity of secure radiocarbon dates and had to

rely largely on educated speculation in his identification of these early sites which, by his own admission, made his conclusions the more tentative. Indeed, subsequent excavation of one of his possible formative henges (Walton Court, Powys) has returned a mid third millennium date (Jones 2010).

Variety in henges

The variety of monuments that became increasingly added to the henge corpus was excellently outlined by Clare over a quarter of a century ago and needs little reiteration here (Clare 1986). One of the problems is that sites are being recognised from aerial photography or other prospection techniques without the benefit of excavation and classifying a site by morphology alone can be dangerous leading to the possible confusion of monuments from different periods as admirably demonstrated by Harding and Lee (1987). Indeed a recent review of Welsh henges by the present writer has identified a number of later prehistoric enclosures that had originally been erroneously (perhaps hopefully) identified as henges (Gibson forthcoming (a)).

With Wainwright’s introduction of the word ‘hengiform’ free reign was given to include monuments of all sizes and indeed of different forms. Amongst the better known henges, for example Stonehenge and Llandegai

A (Gwynedd) have internal banks, but Llandegai A has a single entrance while Stonehenge has 2, possibly 3 (Figure 6). Woodhenge has a single entrance but an external bank and possibly an internal mound. The original name for Woodhenge prior to its excavation was the ‘Dough Cover’ so named after its low domed interior (Cunnington 1929). Cunnington attributed the mounded interior to agricultural processes suggesting that the chalk had been eroded near the ditch by circular ploughing around the ditch edge. It may be however, that the chalk in the central area had been protected from the plough by a low mound which, in its turn had been ploughed away. If the mound hypothesis is accepted, then Woodhenge resembles Dyffryn Lane, Powys, which also had a single entrance and an internal mound but Dyffryn Lane enclosed a stone circle while Woodhenge enclosed the site of a timber one. At the double-entranced site at Llandegai B the ditch is 4m wide and encloses a circular area roughly 70m in diameter (Figure 7) whilst at Vaynor, Ceredigion, the ditch is twice as wide yet encloses a comparatively small oval internal area averaging only 16m in diameter (Barber and Pannet 2006): compare this with the ditch at Duggleby Howe which averages 6.5m across yet encloses a massive area some 370m in diameter. In terms of diameter Duggleby compares well with Durrington Walls, but at this latter site the ditch was over twice as wide and twice as deep. Durrington Walls also had an external bank, Duggleby had

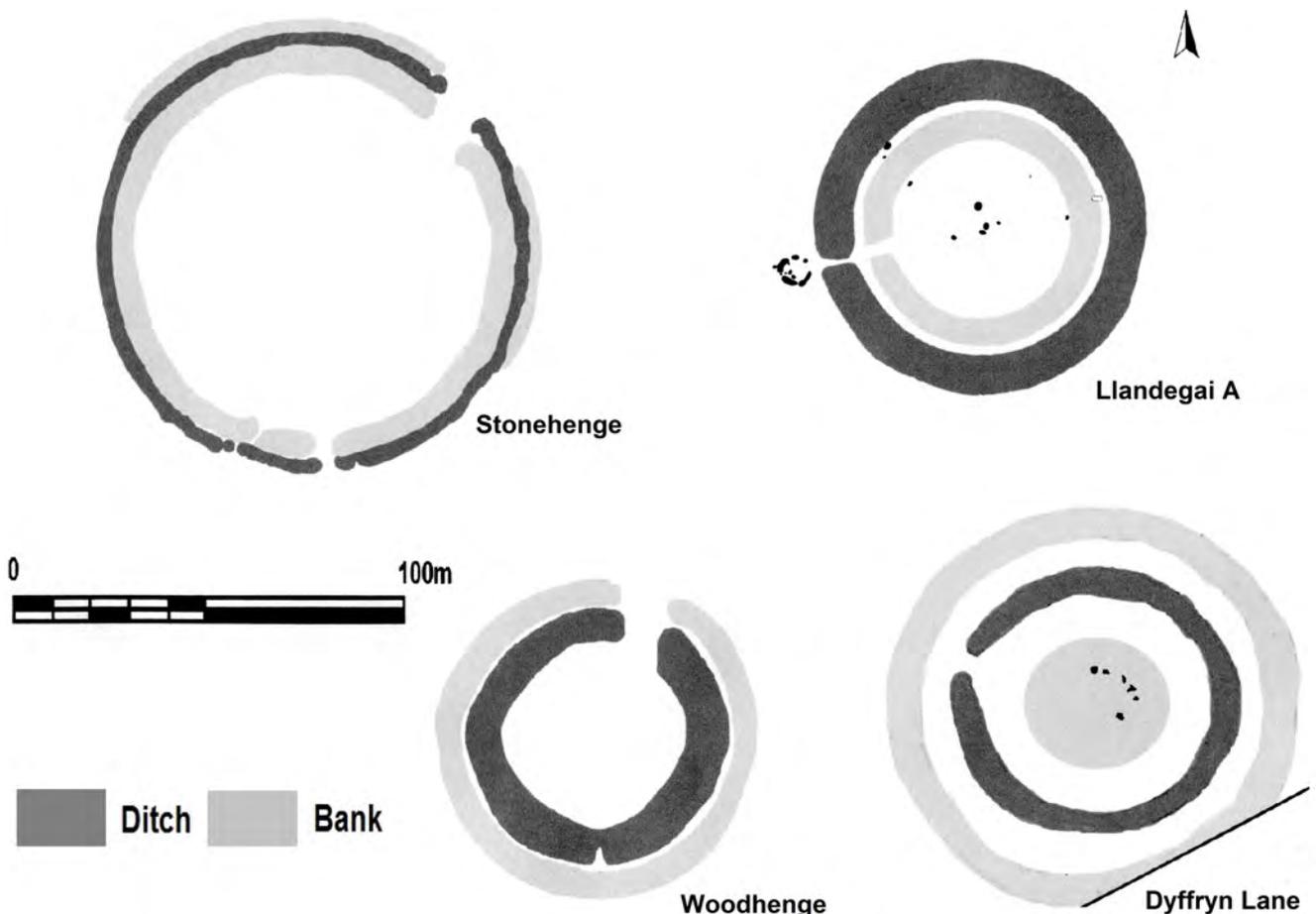


FIGURE 6: VARIATION IN HENGE BANK LAYOUT.

Llandegai B
Gwynedd



Vaynor
Ceredigion

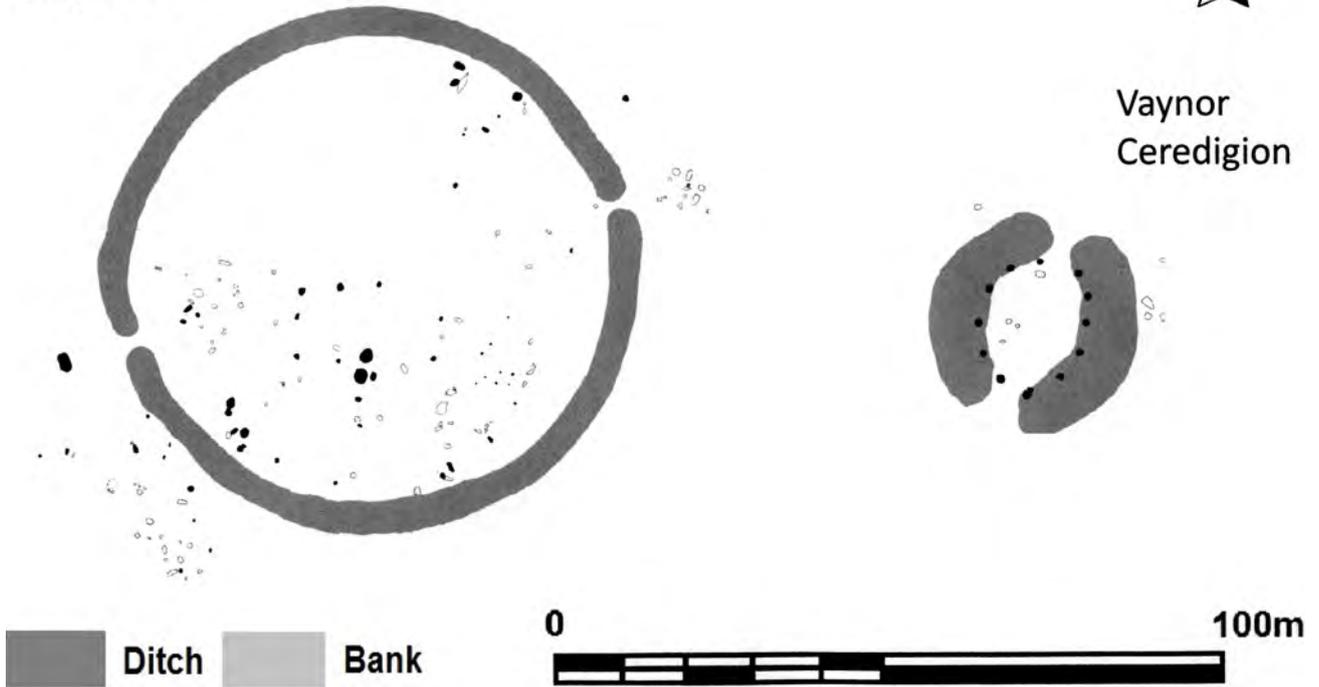


FIGURE 7: COMPARISON IN DITCH DIMENSIONS BETWEEN THE LARGE LLANDEGAI B, GWYNEDD AND THE SMALL VAYNOR, CEREDIGION. NEITHER SITE APPEARS TO HAVE HAD BANKS.

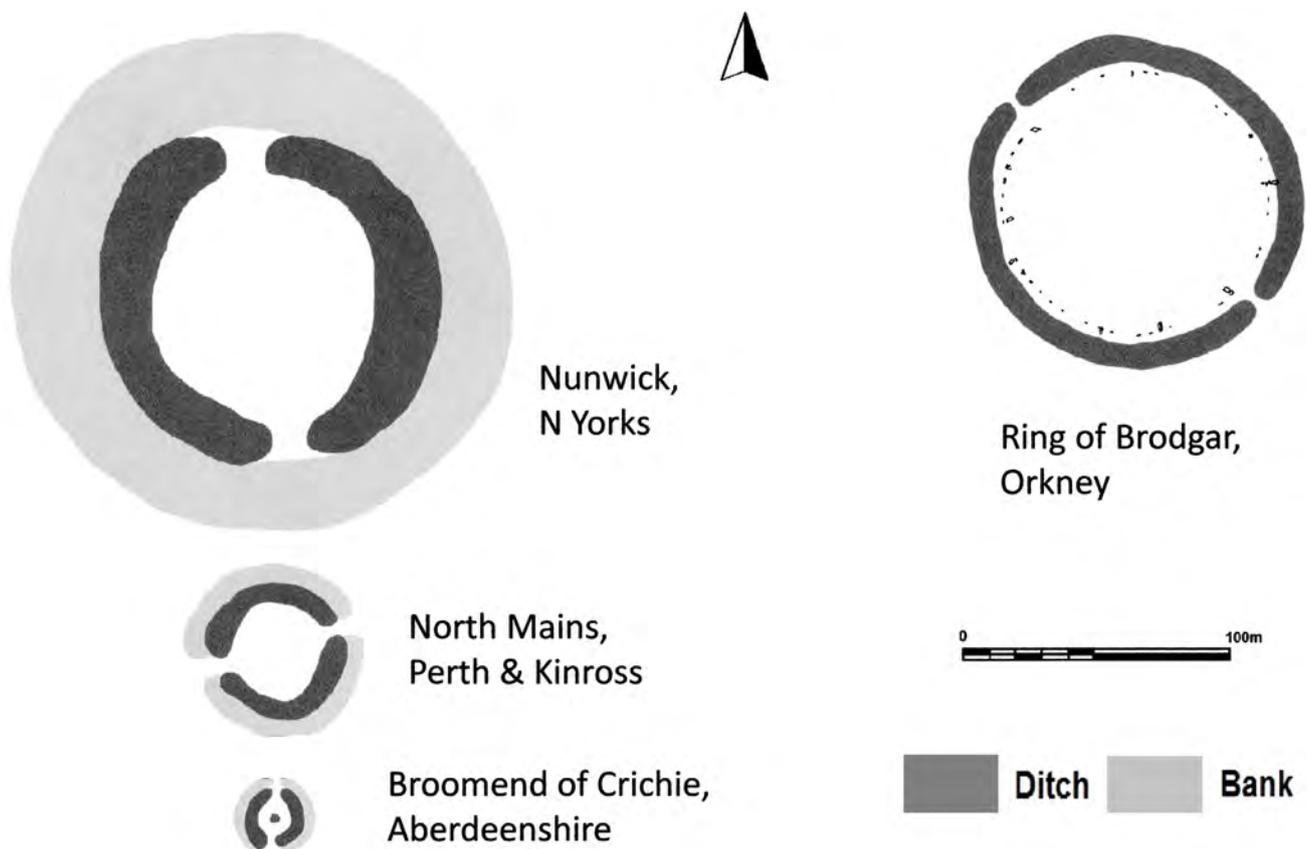


FIGURE 8: DIFFERENCES IN INTERNAL DIAMETER IN RELATION TO DITCH AND BANK DIMENSIONS.



FIGURE 9: TWO CLASS I SITES GREATLY DIFFERING IN SIZE AND SEQUENCE.

none. The class II henge at Nunwick, North Yorkshire has an internal area averaging some 85m in diameter (Dymond 1963) enclosed by a ditch some 13m wide but less than 2m deep (Figure 8). The similarly shaped monument at North Mains, Perth and Kinross, measured only some 33m across with a ditch 6-11m wide and up to 3m deep. In contrast the still smaller class II Broomend of Crichtie, Aberdeenshire, (c.15m internal diameter) had a 6m wide ditch of similar depth. At the other extreme, Brodgar, Orkney, has an internal diameter of c.110m but with a rock cut ditch little deeper or wider than North Mains (3m deep and 10m wide as weathered – Renfrew 1979 fig 15). Loanhead of Daviot, Aberdeenshire, and Fargo Plantation share the Class II form. The former averages 11m in internal area with a ditch under 1m wide and 0.25m deep whilst the latter averages half the diameter of Loanhead yet has ditches 1.5m wide. Neither have banks. If Bradley's suggestion that the Loanhead ditch was a palisade slot is accepted, then the form takes on a greater significance (Bradley 2011).

At the classic single-entranced site at Stennes, Orkney, the internal area averaged 45m in diameter and the ditch averaged 3.5-4m across and over 2m deep (Figure 9). The henge enclosed the well known stone circle and other internal features and Ritchie (1976) regarded the stone circle as primary. At 10m in internal diameter, the morphologically similar single-entranced enclosure at

Moncrieffe, Perth and Kinross, is less than a quarter of the size of Stennes and with a much smaller ditch only 1.4m wide and up to 0.75m deep (Stewart 1985). This enclosed a circle of pits but, according to the excavator, the ditch was backfilled before a stone circle was added. In contrast, at Broomend of Crichtie, Dyffryn Lane, and Balfarg, Fife, the stone circles appear to have been earlier than the enclosures and this sequence has also been inferred at other sites such as Arbor Low, Cairnpapple Hill (West Lothian), and possibly even at Avebury.

Indeed there is now a considerable body of data to suggest that enclosing ditches were late in many site sequences. Grooved Ware at Woodhenge comes from under the bank so was clearly at the site before the earthwork was constructed. The enclosure is also most likely to be secondary to the timber circles and possibly even the later stone setting (Pollard and Robinson 2007). It may be that the Woodhenge earthwork is associated with a possible low internal mound and perhaps also the off-centre burial though, given the degree of excavation at the site, this must remain hypothetical and is unlikely to be resolved. Despite this, the layout of the timber circles and by analogy with other sites such as North Mains, Broomend of Crichtie and Dyffryn Lane a long sequence at Woodhenge can be suggested (Figure 10).

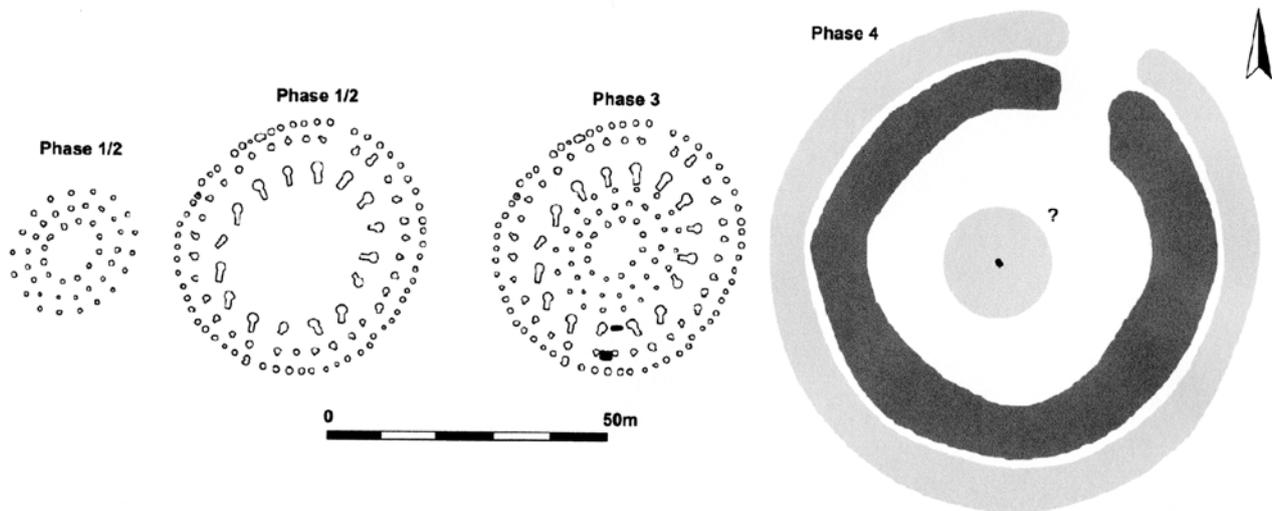


FIGURE 10: POSSIBLE PHASING AT WOODHENGE, WILTSHIRE

It is clear from the south-facing ramps in the northern arc of ring C that these posts could not have been erected whilst rings D, E, and F were extant. Their lack of orientation on the enclosure entrance also suggests that their arrival at the site was not hindered by the earthwork. Similarly the construction of rings D, E and F would have been difficult if the posts of ring C were in place. The ramps of ring B face outwards and once again logic suggests that they are most likely to pre-date the enclosure and to post-date ring C. The stone setting post-dates rings C and B as does the enclosure bank and ditch. The place of the crouched infant sacrifice at the centre of the monument remains unresolved. The mode of burial may suggest that it is Beaker or later however crouched infant burials are known from the beginning of the third millennium at, for example, Duggleby Howe (Gibson and Bayliss 2010). The position of the grave across the axis of the timber circles might draw comparison to the altar stone at Stonehenge, however it may equally draw analogy with the central burials at Broomend, Balfarg, North Mains, Cairnpapple Hill and possibly also Arbor Low and Dyffryn Lane. A low internal mound possibly existed at Woodhenge and certainly existed at Dyffryn Lane and Cairnpapple Hill and can be inferred at Balfarg (Gibson 2010a) so it may be with this mound that the enclosure ditch and child burial are associated in the closing centuries of the third millennium. That the monument continued to be a focus of attention can be demonstrated by the burial dug into the floor of the eastern section of the ditch and dated to the second quarter of the second millennium.

Thus a protracted relative sequence can be proposed. Phase 1 comprises rings D, E and F. These went out of use and were replaced by rings B, C, and A. These rings were replaced by a stone setting. The enclosure ditch was excavated on a slightly different alignment and provided material for an external bank and possibly a low mound covering the child inhumation. This act effectively closed the interior of the site and brought to an end the rituals that must have been practiced in this arena. Finally a burial was

placed in the ditch in the Early Bronze Age c.1800 – 1600 cal BC.

The outward facing post ramps at North Mains and the unidirectional south-facing ramps at Arminghall similarly argue for the primacy of the timber phases: an hypothesis finally proven by the radiocarbon dating of a cremation sealed by the bank at North Mains (Barclay 2005). The primacy of the timber circle at Milfield North, Northumberland, is not in doubt as the postholes were sealed by the outer bank (Harding 1981). In 2010 it was suggested that the proximity of stones to the inner edge of the ditch argued for the primacy of stone circles at ‘circle-henges’ (Gibson 2010b). The ramps at the Devil’s Quoits, Oxon, support this hypothesis and resemble the post ramps at North Mains. Bradley (2011) has taken this further by highlighting not just the proximity of the stones to the ditch edge, but also the change in orientation between the pre-enclosure ovals and the enclosure entrances at Broomend of Crichtie, Cairnpapple Hill and Arbor Low.

The secondary nature of the enclosing earthwork, therefore, may well explain the peculiar configuration of henge monuments, namely the internal ditch and external bank. Were the earthworks to enclose an area that was already ritually important, then the external bank would not compromise the internal space. The ditch could be excavated close to the perimeter of that space and the bank spread away from it, outside the special area. The external bank may therefore be purely practical. Irregular banks (Avebury, Arbor Low) and sites without banks (Vaynor, Llandegai B) might suggest the relative importance of the ditch as the main delineating feature (Gibson 2010b).

There are therefore considerable differences in detail, sequences, site form and size amongst monuments usually labelled henges. The only real uniting factor is the presence of a ditch and the lack of ‘domestic’ detritus (but see Gorsey Bigbury – Jones 1938).

Links with other monuments

The direct links with other monuments, of which the enclosing ditch plays a component part have already been illustrated above. But these earthwork enclosures are frequently associated with other earlier and later monuments in what have been called ritual complexes. This is not the place to detail such complexes and Harding and Lee (1987) have already examined this phenomenon but a few examples from diverse regions will serve to illustrate the point.

Dyffryn Lane, for example is only 500m SE of the Lower Luggy long barrow and Neolithic enclosure (Gibson 2010b) and is itself surrounded by a complex of cropmark barrows and ring-ditches, some of which appear to be penannular. A cursus monument has recently been located to the west (Jones 2009). Links with cursus monuments are well known at Dorchester (Atkinson *et al.* 1951), Barnack and Maxey, Cambridgeshire, (Harding with Lee 1987, 77 and 89) where again ring-ditches and penannular enclosures are also present. North Mains is part of a cluster of round barrows and ring ditches in the Earn Valley (Barclay 1983) Whilst in the Tay Valley, penannular and double entranced enclosures are in close association with the palisaded site at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross, datable to the first half of the third millennium (Brophy and Noble 2011).

Interesting at these sites is the juxtaposition of other circular ditched enclosures, usually termed ring-ditches, yet it is not always clear what features single out the henge. In some cases the henge has a wider and more prominent ditch however as we have seen above, the ditches at other henges can be slight indeed.

Current dating

In 1939, Piggott had suggested that henges were linked to 'Beaker Folk' however the tendency of late has been to regard henges as later Neolithic phenomena extending into the Beaker period and beyond. The reason for this earlier start is clearly the dates of c.3000 cal BC for Stonehenge I (Cleal *et al.* 1995), the later Neolithic (now mid-late Neolithic) 'Dorchester Culture' artefacts such as maceheads and bone skewer pins from Atkinson's excavations at the type-site and elsewhere and the high-profile Grooved Ware-producing excavations at the Wessex henges, particularly Durrington Walls and Woodhenge as well as further north at Balfarg, North Mains and even Stennes. The idea of formative henges in terms of circular ditched sites linking the fourth and mid third millennia has already been discussed.

The problem with dating henges, however, is what to date. Firstly, and as outlined above, the whole issue of 'what is a henge' has become hopelessly confused since the monument class was first defined. How can we be sure in such an environment that the site we are dating is in fact a henge?

Leaving aside the well-known contaminant possibilities such as old oak and curated human and animal remains, unless there are helpfully placed deliberate and fresh deposits such as articulated bone on the ditch floor (not silts), then we cannot be certain that what we are dating is the construction of the henge. Even then the ditch may have been kept clean for a considerable period before the articulated bone was deposited. Dates and/or finds from beneath the bank can only provide *Termini Post Quos* (TPQ) dates while deposits in the ditch, no matter how low down (with the exception of deliberately placed deposits mentioned above) can at best provide *Termini Ante Quos* (TAQ) determinations. Material from features within or outside the henge can at best only date the activity at the site unless there is a stratigraphic relationship between the dated feature and henge perimeter in which case once again TPQ and TAQ dates are the best that can be expected. However these can still be informative as can site layout and associations.

Increased radiocarbon dating is also starting to suggest that 'things we call henges' are quite long-lived phenomena, lasting from just before 3000 BC until the first half of the second millennium (Harding 2003, Figure 6). It would appear that some 'types' of hengiform may actually be long-lived. Thus the small single-entranced 'hengiform' at Sarn-y-bryn-caled Site 2 (Gibson 1994) seen as a formative henge by Burrow (2010) is virtually identical in shape to the enclosed Bronze Age cremation cemetery at Balneaves, Angus (Russell-White *et al.* 1992). The former dates to the beginning of the third millennium (Gibson 2010c), the latter to the middle of the second millennium and the evidence for a bank at both sites is by no means certain. The ditch surrounding Maes Howe suggests it was dug in the early third millennium (Renfrew 1979), the ditch around Duggleby Howe in the mid third millennium (Gibson forthcoming (b)) though it must be remembered that Duggleby is over twice the size of the Maes Howe enclosure.

Indeed many of the dates for henges are of poor integrity. Many come from unidentified and/or bulked samples from the ditch silts and given the mobility of charcoal in the soil must be treated with extreme caution. For example it has been recently pointed out that the dates for the Milfield henge complex in Northumberland derive from samples that 'consist of bulked unidentified charcoal' (Waddington 2011, 287-8.). Waddington claims that the age at death offset may affect these dates and whilst this is true, the real situation is much worse. Such charcoal may have washed in from earlier features cut by the henge ditch and destroyed by its weathering. Just such a scenario is used to explain the early dates for the Milfield 'droveway' that passes through the henge complex (Waddington 2011, 290).

The site that is consistently identified as a formative henge, largely from its internal bank and therefore its similarity with Stonehenge, is Llandegai A. Dates for this monument at the end of the fourth millennium are often

cited, but analysis of the contexts for these dates suggest that the dating of the henge is far from secure. An axial alignment is formed through the entrance of the henge from the central Pit A1 to a causewayed ring-ditch outside the entrance. The cremation burial in pit 370 just to the south of the eastern end of this alignment was dated to the 32nd-31st C cal BC (Lynch and Musson 2004). The three dates from the causewayed ring ditch outside the western entrance span the 37th to 29th C cal BC at 2 sigma (34th-29th C at 1 sigma) but the dates are largely derived from oak charcoal so may well suffer from the old wood effect and are at best TPQs for the ring-ditch. Nevertheless, the common axis of this ring-ditch the central axis of the henge and the broadly contemporary central Pit A1 (also dated from oak charcoal) attest a broad association. The position of pit 370 appears to extend this alignment to the western edge of the enclosure but this was sealed by the bank and produced a Mesolithic date.

The date from layer 4 in the ditch of Llandegai A is from above the primary silts in the ditch. At first sight this suggests that the ditch was silting in the 34th-27th C cal BC but again we must question the integrity of this sample which comprised bulked charcoal including oak. Given the middle Neolithic activity inside and outside the henge, this material (and the fragmentary middle Neolithic pottery) may easily be derived from earlier eroded contexts and have been incorporated into the silts as a result of natural weathering as was claimed for the Milfield driveway. It is argued here that none of the dates from Llandegai A date the construction of the henge and that they provide at best a TPQ. The cremation burial from F13 in the north-east quadrant, however dates to the 18th – 20th centuries cal BC over 1 millennium later than the axial features. It is argued here that the henge may date to any time within that millennium.

Two sets of C14 dates from Dyffryn Lane ostensibly act as TPQ dates for the henge construction. The first, associated with Impressed Ware pits below the bank and derived from short-lived charcoal, ranges from approximately the 30th to 29th Centuries cal BC. The second, also derived from short-lived charcoal from a hearth below the bank dates to 26th-25th Centuries cal BC (Gibson 2010b). The difference in context however is important. The pits were sealed by a thin buried soil beneath the bank whilst the hearth lay on top of this and directly below the bank material. We can safely accept the hearth dates as the more accurate and the Impressed Ware dates as considerably pre-dating henge construction. Might we have been so well informed had the site formed part of a machine-stripped landscape excavation?

If the radiocarbon dates are taken at face value, Class I henges span the period 3500cal BC –cal AD 700 (Figure 11). There are clearly outliers that can be seriously questioned such as the late date from Lairg, Maxey and Stennes which may show that the henge was still receiving attention but are more likely to derive from natural processes. The early dates from Shepperton confirm this

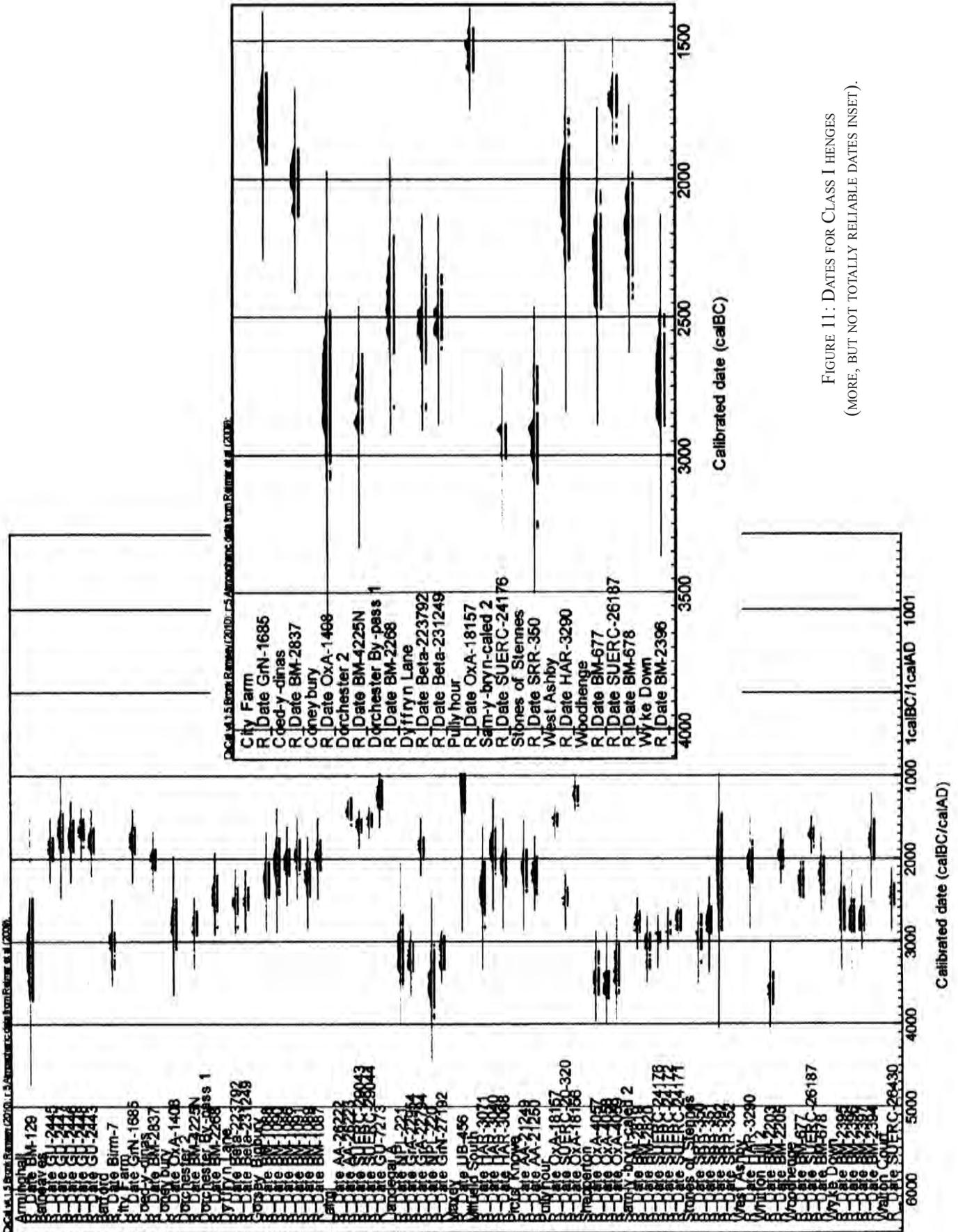
penannular enclosure as belonging to the middle Neolithic ring-ditch series. That from Whitton Hill is an old and unidentified charcoal and the Llandegai dates have already been discussed, and hopefully dismissed. The date from Arminghall with its large margin of error compounds with the plateau in the radiocarbon curve and dates the timber circle rather than the henge.

If we look at only the dates that provide construction dates or TPQ dates for the construction of the Class I henges (such as samples from ditch floors and buried soils) the corpus reduces considerably but the basic date range is still maintained. Once again Sarn-y-bryn-caled may be considered a Middle Neolithic penannular enclosure but even if this is dismissed, we still have the early date for Stennes. The dates for Woodhenge are interesting. The latest comes from the burial cut into the base of the eastern ditch section. The Cunningtons did not notice a cut through the silts. We are left with two scenarios. Either the original British Museum dates date the enclosure to the early Beaker period or they are derived from old weathered material and the burial in the base of the ditch dates the construction of the monument. The problem is not easily resolvable. One involves the dismissing of two similar dates from the same general context, while the other perhaps puts an over-reliance on the Cunningtons' excavation methodology.

This approach may be considered parsimonious however if we include features from within the henge interiors and ditches which certainly date the use of the monuments the date range is much the same. Our three general, parsimonious and selected datasets agree that single entranced henges span the period 3000 cal BC to about 1200 cal BC.

As has been mentioned above, Class II henges with opposed or near-opposed entrances are generally considered to be later with Beaker or mature Early Bronze Age associations. A view of all radiocarbon dates from Class II henges suggests that this is not the case however the early Broomend of Crichtie dates date pre-henge activity as is almost certainly true for Balfarg compounded by the old wood factor (Figure 12). The Yeavinger date is also undoubtedly from derived material and the Ferrybridge henge is dated from possibly residual material on top of the phase 1 bank (Roberts 2005). Once again the parsimonious approach considerably reduces the corpus and this does indeed suggest that class II henges are a chalcolithic phenomenon. The dates for the construction and use of these sites following the selection criteria adopted for the class I sites however shows a much more limited date range starting with the introduction of Beakers in the 25th C cal BC and continuing into the Early Bronze Age but not really lasting beyond the currency of late Beakers (Needham 2005).

The date ranges for the Class I and Class II henges are very different. The former spans 2 millennia, the latter less than one. The longevity of the class I sites can also



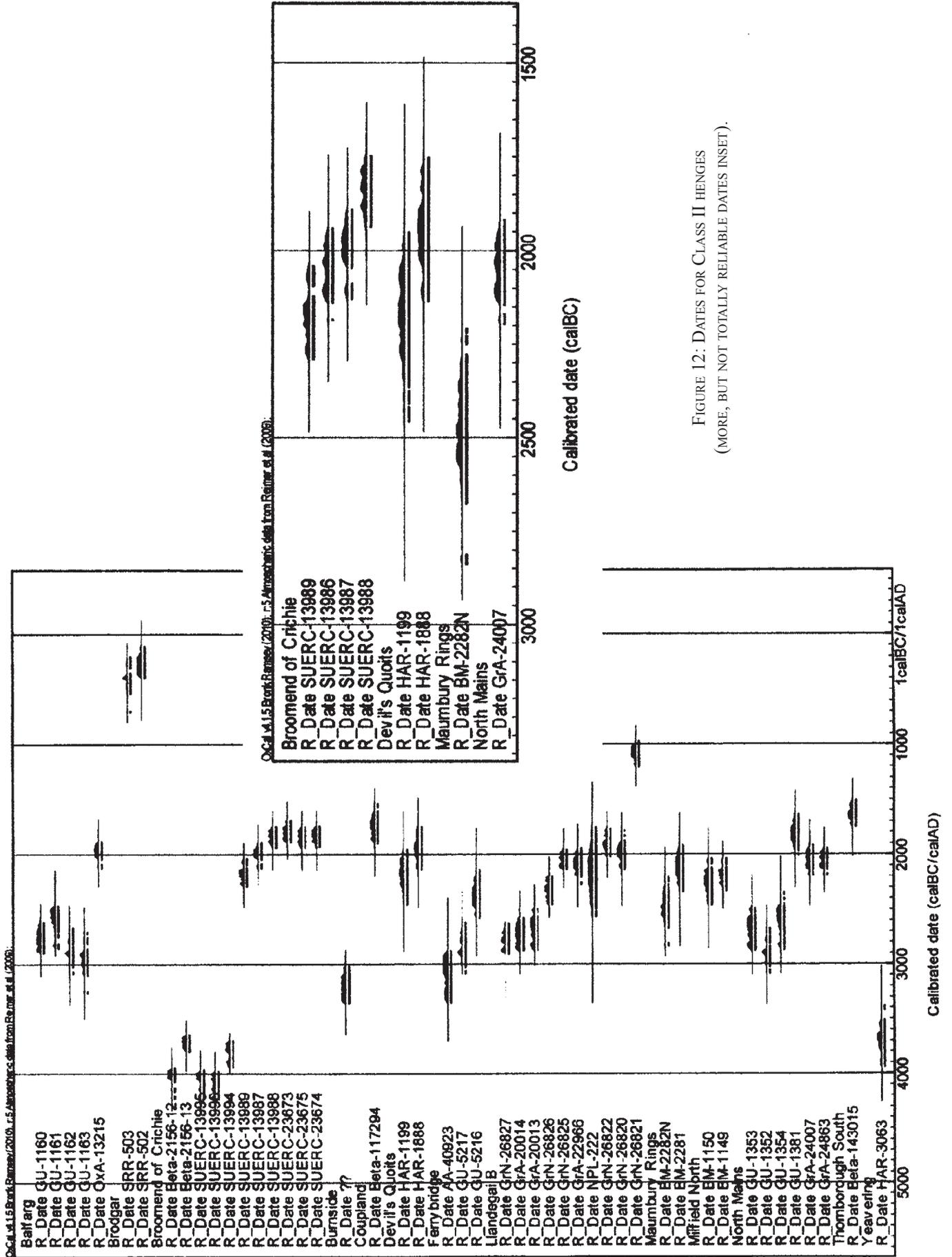


FIGURE 12: DATES FOR CLASS II HENGES
 (MORE, BUT NOT TOTALLY RELIABLE DATES INSET).

be compared with their great diversity and form. Small sites are both early (Sarn-y-bryn-caled 2, Dorchester 2) and late (Balneaves, City farm, Lairg, Pullyhour) with larger sites adopting the middle of the range. This similar chronological rise and fall has been suggested for timber circles (Gibson 1994; 1998) and there is a growing amount of evidence to suggest that it may also be true for stone circles that are notoriously difficult to date but that similarly span this long period.

It now seems that there is a distinct dichotomy within the henge classes. A long-lived and varied tradition of single-entranced enclosures with a much more chronologically defined and morphologically homogenous group of double-entranced enclosures.

Time for a change

The problem with henges is of our own making. We have seen that from the introduction of the name until the 1960's the term was usually cited in inverted commas intimating a general unease with the label for almost 30 years. We have seen that there are (at least) three types and according to this typology, Stonehenge is not a henge, nor for that matter is Llandegai A. Nevertheless the classifications were stretched to allow these unusual sites to be included. Not only are there henges with internal and external banks, but there are 'hengés' with no banks at all such as the class II site at Vaynor (Barber and Pannet 2006), Brodgar (Renfrew 1979), Llandegai B (Lynch and Musson 2004), and the causewayed ditch at Duggleby Howe (Gibson forthcoming b). The only consistent features then seem to be a ditch and a tendency towards circularity. Indeed non-existent banks as mentioned above or irregular banks (Arbor Low) suggest to the present writer that it is the ditch that is the important feature. Often dug wide and deep in relation to their diameters they form considerable trenches around their foci perhaps symbolically to contain what lies within their perimeter as suggested by Warner (2000). The idea is attractive but its impact is lessened to a degree in the cases of those sites without banks and the pure practicality of internal ditches and external banks (or indeed ditches with no banks) has already been discussed above. Harding and Lee examined henge ditch width in relation to site diameters but no real patterning was visible but they nevertheless suggested that henge ditches should be over 2.5m wide and that anything 'less substantial than this are simply not accepted into the canon of henge sites' (1987, 40). But this seems a somewhat arbitrary boundary.

The idea of formative henges might also be seriously questioned. It is difficult to see how these largely circular sites developed into the more geometrically uniform oval monument (Class II) with two entrances, especially when the single entranced form continues in currency throughout and beyond the Class II timespan. These Class II sites do tend to make a better homogenous grouping than do the Class I monuments. They range considerably in size but do appear to be Beaker or later in date and are united in their opposed entrances and often slightly asymmetric

outline. As already pointed out by Bradley (2011) there is a fundamental difference between the single and double entranced henges beyond simple morphology: the former prescribe entrance and exit by the same pathway, the latter allow passage through the monument. This must have an important bearing on the ways in which these sites were used and suggests a fundamental difference between the 2 classes. Indeed this can be taken further and class II would not only allow passage through but also entry from two directions. This may be important given Loveday's suggestion that Class II henges may have been constructed on or near to ancient routeways as later fossilised by Roman roads (Loveday 1998).

When the term 'henge' was coined to refer to a specific number of sites it was already inadequate as the sites were diverse. With increased aerial prospection, increased dating and the growth of developer-funded archaeology, so the diversity of circular Neolithic and Bronze Age ditched enclosures has similarly expanded. Surely it is time to stop shoe-horning diverse sites into an out-dated and now inadequate class of monument. The henge has served us well but it may be time to put it to rest: we are reminded of Atkinson's claim that the term henge was redundant as early as 1951. But 'henge' is emotive and to the lay person the mystery of the name conjures up the mystery of the distant past. 'Henge' invokes ideas of Neolithic rituals and ceremonies, of temples and sanctuaries to the extent that it has been applied to some monuments which cannot be termed henges in the archaeological sense: Seahenge (a palisade barrow at Holme-next the-Sea) and the Welsh Woodhenge (as the press referred to the timber circle at Sarn-y-bryn-caled). As archaeologists, however, we are trained to be objective. Thus some archaeologists will excavate Neolithic timber houses, whilst the more cautious will acknowledge them only to be 'timber structures'. With this objectivity in mind, the present writer advocates the abandonment of 'henge'.

There can be no denying that shortly before 3000 BC there was a dramatic change in monument construction. Causewayed Enclosures and Long Barrows ceased to be built and the laying out of elongated Cursus monuments occupied but a brief episode. Monuments constructed after 3000 BC are almost exclusively circular or oval be they of stone, timber or earth.

Stone circles range in date from 3000 to approximately 1200 BC. Timber circles are broadly contemporary though both monument types have problems with their dating relying on conveniently placed material in the stoneholes and charring of the outer rings of the timber uprights. Both are later Neolithic in their origins, sharing their initial horizons with the advent of Grooved Ware. They both continue through the Beaker or Chalcolithic period. Both cease to be built in the Bronze Age their demise coinciding with that of the Food Vessel and Urn traditions. There are distinct groupings and types within both the stone and timber circle classes. In the case of stone circles there are the large open circles of Cumbria, the smaller rings

of Dartmoor, four posters, flattened circles, oval circles, embanked circles, the low simple circles of Wales to the complexity of Callanish and Stonehenge. In timber circles there are single, double and multiple forms of both circular and oval rings. Both monument types connect with Bronze Age burial monuments with timber circles found below and around barrows and stone circles merging with the kerb and ring-cairn traditions.

Circles defined by ditches are no different. Their variety of form has been the subject of much of this paper. The earliest examples are exactly contemporary with the earliest circles of stone or wood and they too suffer from an imprecise chronology. Like stone and timber circles, they are varied in their size and architecture but they are clearly part of the same tradition of circularity as stone and timber circles and indeed the three monument types may overlap physically for example at Balfarg and Stanton Drew. Their construction ceases at the same time in the Bronze Age. They also merge with contemporary burial monuments, particularly in the lowland zone as outlined by Clare over 25 years ago (1986).

Back in 1939, in an article in *Antiquity*, the Piggotts described the earth circles of Dorset. They used 'henge' in inverted commas and acknowledged the variety in the class. If we have circles of stone and wood, then why not also earth. The term is not loaded with prejudice, interpretation or emotive baggage but rather treats these sites with the same objectivity as their stone and timber counterparts. The term can be sub-divided. Thus we might have penannular earth circles, oval earth circles, embanked earth circles, concentric earth circles and so on. Neither does size matter because the objective name is equally applicable to both small sites such as Sarn-y-bryn-caled 2 and the larger sites such as Brodgar in the same way as the stone circle class spans the range from four posters to Avebury. By using such a simple and descriptive name we also acknowledge the links with other contemporary circles noting only the differences in the media of their construction. 'Henge' has done us well but should now be put to rest.

Double-entranced earth circles, however, share a very similar form and grammar regardless of their size. They usually comprise an oval area formed by two unequal segments of curved ditch and again a bank is not obligatory. The form is also found in timber and in stone and as Bradley has shown, they almost certainly operated in a way different to the single-entranced enclosures. These may be a class apart and certainly seem to be much more restricted in date. They may well have had a specialised role within the general milieu of earthen circles. If henge is to be retained then it may be to these distinctive monuments that the label may be applied.

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