

April 2020

Note on the Standing Stones of Wirksworth

In the circumstances of the current Virus, it is not possible for us to proceed with any fieldwork as a group, and consequently we have not begun work on the survey of the meadows in Wirksworth.

Meanwhile, I note a query by Helen Marshall about the Bradstone, which is a Menhir (Long Stone) in a field on the south side of Brassington Lane in Wirksworth. This is Helen's photo of it:



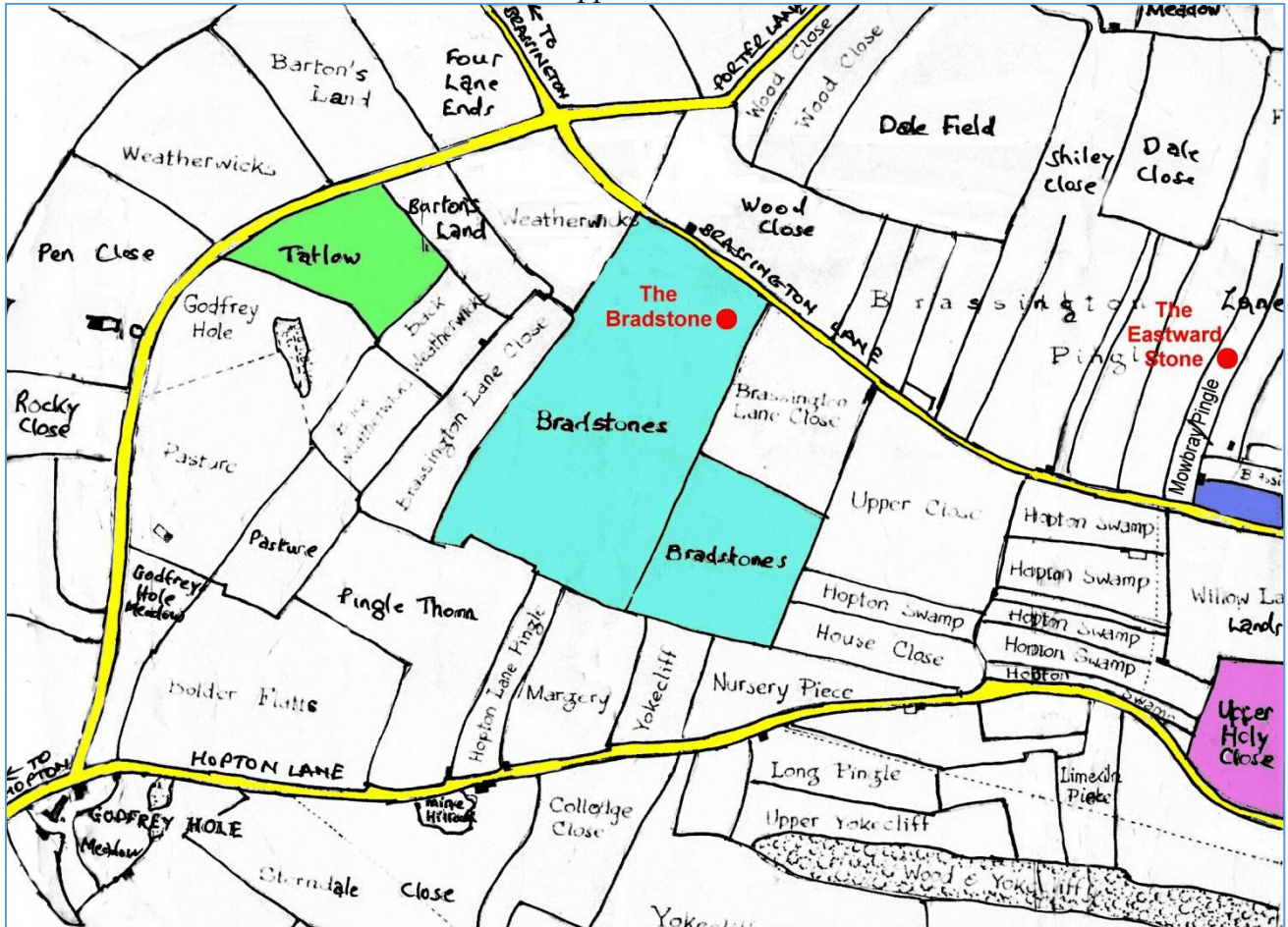
The Bradstone, looking approx west

This stone is well-known locally. Archaeologically speaking Standing Stones perform different functions - as way or route markers, boundary or territorial stones or as memorials to a burial or burial site. These types of stones date from the Neolithic Age (from around 3000 BC) to the end of the Bronze Age (around 700 BC).

The Bradstone is very close to the burial mounds at Tatlows, which are not far from Godfrey Hole, a hamlet at the corner of Porter Lane and Hopton Lane, these are probably Bronze Age mounds. In 1828, miners working next to Brassington Lane (Flindall, 2005) found a number of burials containing "black buttons" (possibly jet) which we believe were Bronze Age. The Bradstone and its lost companion, the Eastward Stone, seem to mark this area as a burial ground, it is high ground above the town and it enjoys fine views in many directions. Slightly to the south-east of the Bradstone are two fields called holy lands, Upper and Nether Holy Close, this may or may not be significant, it may just indicate some kind of church land, but this is a caveat, we have to bear in mind that in the laws of lead mining it was not permitted to mine in burial grounds, for this to be

effective those grounds might have to be named “Holy”. Two other locations near Wirksworth have “holy land” field names, one formerly near Middlepeak and the other at Adam Bede Crescent, these, like the Bradstone holy lands, are within close proximity to the town, we cannot say whether this is mere co-incidence or actually an indicator of Wirksworth having been a far older settlement than we currently have evidence for.

Approx North



Sketch extract of the 1836 map of Wirksworth (the Township map) with the fields named Bradstone Fields in turquoise.

- Tatlows Field in Green
- Upper Holy Close in Pink
- Possible 1828 burials finds site in Blue

The previous map, the 1709 Gell Estate map, does not cover this area very well, it only names a few fields. For example, Weatherwicks (fields where sheep or goats are kept) is the same in 1709 and 1836; Dale Field is Great Dale Field in 1709; Hopton Swamp is Hopton Dale in 1709 (swamp means rubbish tip); Willow Lands was Willow Top in 1709. Yokecliffe is unchanged in either map but the very earliest spellings read Zyelcliff, probably in origin “Yeld Cliff”, so Yokecliffe means sloping cliff (yeld is a slope). Mowbray Pingle is also interesting - if not the name of a field owner, then it would mean heap (cairn) on the brow of a hill, notably, given the Eastward Stone was in Mowbray Pingle, Mowbray may refer to the stone itself being on the brow of the hill or having been next to or near a cairn or burial mound.

All these things being so, the archaeological viewpoint would lean towards the Bradstone and the Eastward Stone being Bronze Age markers for a burial area and the intensity of memorial related

activity (in the field names) within sight of the Bradstone is indeed rather curious and perhaps significant. This does not mean we have the present resources to look into it.

Finally, my attention has been drawn to an article about Menhirs by Matthews (1915). In that article he notes the Bradstone was the westward of two stones. About 400 metres slightly north of east (from the Bradstone) and on the north side of Brassington Lane, another stone formerly existed, much closer to the town and again on what was formerly high ground. The Eastward Stone lay at SK 2775 5427 almost at the very south-western corner of the former Dale Quarry, 400 metres from the Bradstone (at SK 2739 5420).



The Eastward Stone, image taken in 1915, looking north

Mowbray Pingle has been quarried away and the stone itself is assumed to have been destroyed by the quarrying. Most unusually for the time of Matthews article in 1915, several pictures of the eastward stone were provided in the Journal, so we have a record.

References

Ekwall, E, 1960, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names, Oxford, University Press, 4Ed, p333

Flindall, R, 2005, Mines, quarries and murder in the Peak District, Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society, 16(1), p25

Matthews, TA, 1915, Some Menhirs, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 31, pp 55-58