

# It was Rock 'n' Roll

...but not as we know it...

It has been a bumper year for centenary celebrations, - for the RAF, for votes for (some) women and for the ending of the First World War. But one other centenary has received much less hype, except in archaeological circles. It is 100 years since Stonehenge was gifted to the nation by Sir Cecil Chubb. He had bought the site in 1915 for about £6000, but seems to have realised quite quickly that it might become a mill-stonehenge (sorry!) round his neck, so he promptly handed it over to the government, who have been responsible for its management ever since.

The anniversary has prompted much new discussion on, and interpretation of, the most recent archaeological activity at the site. Likewise the source of the bluestones at the Preseli Hills in Wales has received a great deal of close scrutiny, confirming that the bluestones on Salisbury Plain did indeed make the 150 mile journey from Pembrokeshire to the henge. And an article in a recent edition of *British Archaeology* renewed the argument as to just how these stones were transported over such a distance. The long-held belief was that they must have used log rollers to shift such heavy objects, but this article disputes this, offering instead the suggestion that the stones were mounted on a kind of sledge which was then dragged over static logs. Experiments seemed to support this theory. It is doubtless a discussion which will run and run, or more likely, given the weight of the stones, crawl and crawl. Plenty of scope, though, for Monty Python:

*“Listen up, guys! I’ve had this brilliant idea. We will build a huge stone circle in the field over the road, and, wait for it, this is where it gets really exciting, not with just any old stones, but special stones from some funny place a long way away in Wales. They are called bluestones, and blue was always my favourite colour. Should be a big hit! What do you think?”*

*“You’re a genius, Reg! The whole world will be flabbergasted and it should keep the youngsters out of mischief for several hundred years.”*

There may, of course, have been the odd dissenting voice:

*“What a dickhead! I’m not doing my back in for another of Reg’s crazy ideas. I’m off across the Channel in my top-of-the-range dug-out canoe to find myself a nice little French girl.”*

The question about Stonehenge which lulls me to sleep at night is that very basic one: Why? What was the motivation which led to such a preoccupation with its structure over many centuries? The fall-back position for archaeologists, when they don’t have a clue, is of course that it must be ritualistic or religious. And perhaps they are right. Stonehenge is perhaps the Neolithic equivalent of our medieval cathedrals, which also used stone in a spectacular fashion to reach out into the mystery of life and creation. Salisbury cathedral, almost in sight of Stonehenge, and its now famous (even in Russia) tower, is one of the most powerful demonstrations of the symbolic use of stone.

And there is no denying that man remains a ritualistic, even a highly superstitious creature. Ample proof of this can be found on the Hohenzollern railway bridge over the Rhine at Cologne. Over the past half a dozen years some 40 000 newly wedded couples have attached their padlocks to the fences on the bridge, thrown away the keys into the Rhine, the permanence of their love symbolised and sanctified for ever by this ritualistic act. Without a doubt something for the archaeologists (and cynics) of 4017 AD to ponder and argue over at great length.

David Cockman for HDAS November 2018