



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

SMYTHE'S MEGALITH

By JOHN H. EVANS, F.S.A.

VARIOUS references have been made from time to time to the discovery in 1823 of a "British Tomb" or "Druidical Monument" on Warren Farm, near Kits Coty House, Aylesford, but an original report of the event written by the late Clement T. Smythe has never been published. By the courtesy of the Museum and Library Committee of Maidstone Borough Council, obtained through the kind offices of Mr. A. J. Golding, F.S.A., we are enabled to print this original report as it appears in the MS. *Clement T. Smythe Collections*, V, folio 30.

"In the summer of 1823 a British Tomb or Druidical Monument was discovered in the parish of Aylesford on the Warren Farm belonging to Geo. Fowle, Esq., of Cobtree, in the same parish. The workmen having repeatedly met with obstruction in ploughing from large stones about 4 inches below the surface, Mr. Fowle directed them to remove the obstructions. Upon digging for that purpose they found that there were three stones of large size, and, as this excited some curiosity, Mr. Fowle determined to uncover the whole prior to destruction.

I received an invitation from Mr. Fowle to be present at the investigation and was there during the progress of the work. Upon removing the earth we found there were three large stones and one smaller stone, all of them of irregular shapes, of the same formation and appearance as the monument close by called Kits Coty House.

That on the N. side 7' 6" x 4' 9" x 1' 2"

That on the S. side 7' 0" x 5' 9" x 2' 3"

That on the W. side 3' 0" x 4' 0" x 1' 6"

Small stone 3' 0" x 2' 0" x 1' 0"

this having been placed to prevent the N. stone from falling against the S. stone. The whole structure had been depressed towards the south.

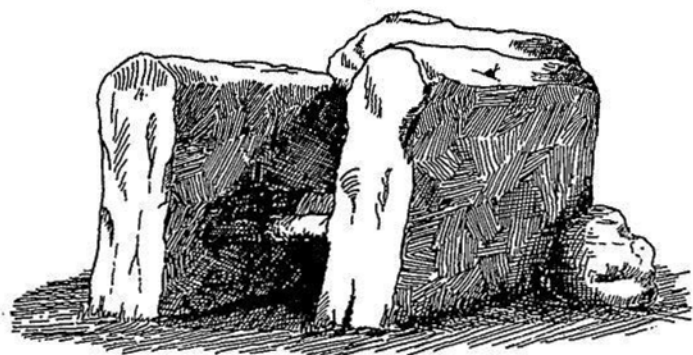
The stones were removed, and next day workmen continued to dig beneath to ascertain if anything had been deposited, and at about 4 feet below the monument, they discovered a flat stone 4 feet long, 3 feet broad, upon which several human bones were found lying E.W., but they were thrown out carelessly by the workmen, and no one being on the spot to take notes, particulars could not be ascertained. Some of the bones were collected and shown to Mr. Charles of Maidstone, who gave the following description of them. With the bones was found a small fragment of an unglazed urn.

REPORT ON BONES BY DR. CHARLES.¹

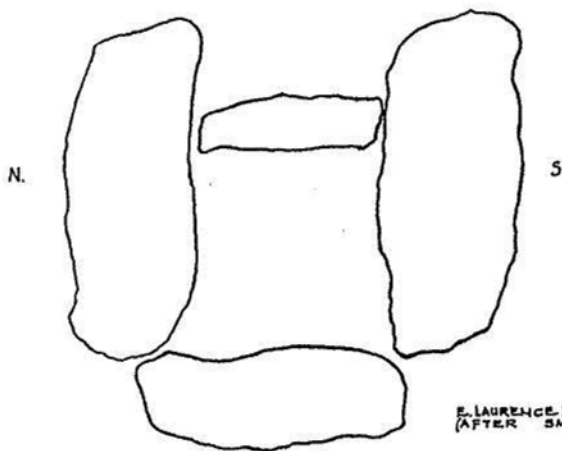
The bones had been broken by the workmen who opened the tomb into very small fragments; some of the metatarsal bones and two of the Cervical Vertebrae were the only ones entire. Many small pieces of the

¹ Dr. Thomas Charles was the founder of the Museum in Chillington House, Maidstone. A brief biography by Charles Roach Smith is in the *Retrospections*, i (1883), 141-6.

SMYTHE'S MEGALITH



E.



E. LAURENCE NICHOL
(AFTER SMYTHE)

MEGALITH AT AYLESFORD

FIG. 1

SMYTHE'S MEGALITH

skull, ribs, thigh, leg and arm bones were found. They were of ordinary size. From the state of the teeth we may conclude they belonged to persons of, or past, middle age, as they were in some places carious, and the points of the molars were worn down and flattened. It is evident that two bodies must have been buried in the tomb as among the fragments of bones collected there were two right sides of under-jaws, and two portions of the Ulna, with the Olcranon, one of which was of much larger make than the other."

ANOTHER NOTE FROM THE SAME SOURCE.

"N. Stone 7' 6" long, 1' 2" thick, 4' 9" wide.

S. Stone 7' 0" long, 2' 3" thick, 5' 9" wide.

W. Stone 3' 0" long, 4' 0" deep, 1' 6" wide.

Middle stone, wide 1 foot, depth 2 feet. The stones on the N. and S. sides incline to S. From the appearance of the stones it is to be supposed that the N. when put in leaned to the S. and the middle stone was put in to support it, but its weight pressing against the N. stone forced that into a similar position. The space between the two stones is about 3 feet at the E. end. About 4' below the surface of the N. stone was a flat stone about 4' long, 3' wide, on which lay the skull of a mole, the rest of the bones lay in a direct line with the E. end. A Jaw bone with several perfect teeth was found; some of the teeth were slightly decayed, apparently previous to death. This tomb is of the same stones as those of Kits Coty House, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away from it.

It was discovered by the plough hitting against the highest stone which was about 4" below the surface. Nothing but bones was discovered except a small piece of pottery."

Such are the short contemporary reports of the unveiling and destruction of yet another burial chamber in the area of the megalithic necropolis around Kits Coty House. The accounts are fortunately illustrated by both a plan and a sketch of the chamber as it appeared when the earth had been removed from above and around it, and they are here reproduced as Figure 1 from the pen of Mr. E. Laurence Nichol, to whom I am greatly obliged for them.

First as to the site of Smythe's Megalith. It is shown on the 6 inch Ordnance Survey Sheet, Kent XXXI, N.E. as being due east of the Lower Bell Inn and right under the lee of Westfield Wood. This position does not agree with that shown for it on a "Map of the Country around Kits Coty House"¹ made by H. Bensted either in, or before, the year 1863, for on this the site is marked as being in the middle of a large field, not so far east, and more to the south than the Ordnance Survey indication. Upon my taking up the question with Mr. C. W. Phillips, F.S.A., Archæology Officer of the Ordnance Survey, he kindly took some trouble to give me the fullest information, telling me that his Department was aware that the site as marked was slightly inaccurate and that when the 6 inch sheets are revised it will be removed to sheet XXXI, S.E. to a point 2 inches from the left inner margin of the sheet,

¹ Bensted. For reference to this Map, see *Arch. Journ.*, XX, p. 384. On the original map in Maidstone Museum, the tomb is described as being discovered in 1822. The true date was July, 1823.

SMYTHE'S MEGALITH

and 0.1 inches from the upper inner margin. This will be in accordance with the site as shown on Bensted's Map, and places the chamber almost on the 300 foot contour line.

We can now guess how the monument came to be discovered in the middle of an arable field, for it would seem that the gradual "ploughing down" of the sloping land thinned the soil over the wall-stone until the plough found the obstacle.

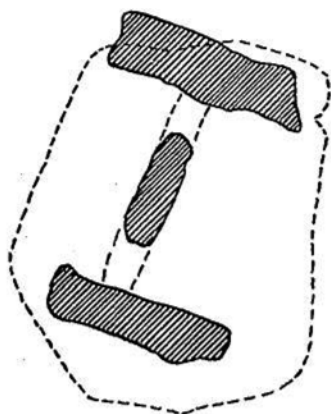
It is fortunate that we have the second Note and the Sketch because Smythe's own account is ambiguous as regards the position of the human remains, where they are described as lying on a stone "about 4' below the monument." But the Note records that the floor stone was found "about 4' below the surface of the N. stone," and the Sketch quite clearly shows the end of the stone within the chamber and in the position which we should expect considering the total depth of the great wall-stones. What apparently happened was that the workmen excavated around the outside of the three wall-stones and the medial stone sufficiently to drag them away with a team of horses, and the next day dug out what had been the interior of the chamber, thus coming upon the bones and the floor stone.

It is unfortunate that Smythe was not present during the second day's work, for we now have no surety that the tomb contained only the remains of two bodies, for the bones were treated very casually by the workmen, who were doubtless more intent upon finding "buried treasure." Dr. Charles's Report is of little value, and all we can gather from it is the probability that the two skeletons were those of a man and a woman both of, or past, middle life.

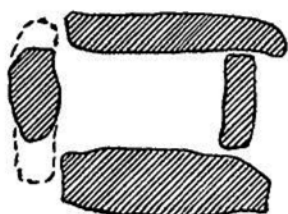
Smythe's plan and sketch do not agree too well with the dimensions which he gives of the four stones which made up the chamber. He does not show the South stone to be almost twice the thickness of that opposite, but the main discrepancy is in the size of the West stone. This is listed as being but 3 feet long, yet both plan and sketch show it as completely closing the western end of the chamber, and partly overlapping the end of the North stone. In the plan of this chamber included in Fig. 2 an attempt has been made to reconstruct it from the dimensions given in the two accounts, and a comparison of this plan with that of Smythe will illustrate the difficulty. Since the East stone was 3 feet long, and the floor stone the same in width, it is clear that the chamber was something over 3 feet wide, and to close the western end in the manner illustrated by Smythe calls for a stone at least 4 feet 6 inches long, and, in fact, this is the length of it (by comparison) in Smythe's own plan. In Fig. 2, the broken lines indicate a stone 5 feet 6 inches long. It is always possible that a figure 5 was transferred from Smythe's note-book to his Report as 3.

The piece of rough pottery recovered serves to remind us that such

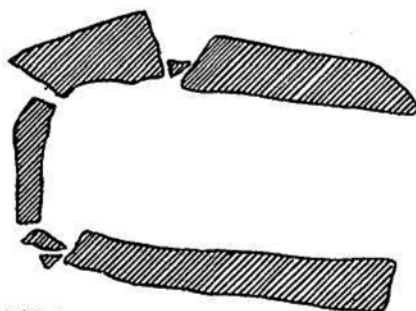
THREE KENTISH
BURIAL CHAMBERS



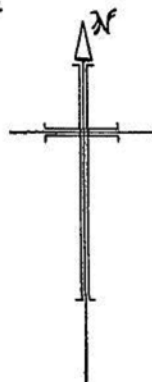
KITS COTY HOUSE



SMYTHE



COLDRUM



SCALE

J^E

FIG. 2.

fragments are recorded as being found at various times in all the West Kent Megaliths, but all have disappeared except that from Coldrum, which is in Maidstone Museum.

The plans of the three chambers shown in Fig. 2, illustrate variations in sizes and shapes, but the orientation is surprisingly uniform. It is not possible to include Stukeley's "ground plot"¹ of the chamber of the Lower Kits Coty (The Countless Stones) because he gave neither scale nor compass bearings, but it was very similar to this of Smythe, having two great wall-stones, while it is evident from the existing stones that it did not fall below Smythe's Chamber in magnitude. The magnificent chamber of Coldrum is unrivalled in Kent, and like Kits Coty House, it once had a medial stone.

It is not intended to extend this Paper with a discussion of the Kentish Megalith type or types, a subject which must be postponed for a future occasion. It will be sufficient here to point out that three of the chief monuments, those of Coldrum, the Lower Kits Coty and the Long Barrow in Addington Park consist, or are on record as having consisted, of chambers associated with peristaliths. In the case of our most famous monument, the upper Kits Coty House, at the beginning of the eighteenth century the outline of the Long Barrow behind the chamber was still visible,² and a contemporary account seems to indicate the presence of the remnants of a peristalith, and we need not doubt that such a feature was once part of this Long Barrow. The only existing exception to the rule of chamber with peristalith is the second Addington Park Group and it is very possible that this was similar in construction to Smythe's Chamber, i.e. a buried burial chamber without peristalith and probably covered with a low mound.

We can only put on permanent record here Smythe's Report, for which, meagre and incomplete as it is, we must be grateful, when we remember the unrecorded destruction wrought throughout the centuries upon this interesting and isolated megalithic necropolis.

¹ Stukeley. *Ground Plot, etc. Itin. Cur.*, 2nd Ed. 1776, Plate 32.

² Mr. R. F. Jessup tells me that faint indications of the mound were seen by him from the air in 1940.