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The Druid Stoke Megalithic Monument

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THE DRUID STOKE MEGALITHIC MONUMENT, BRISTOL

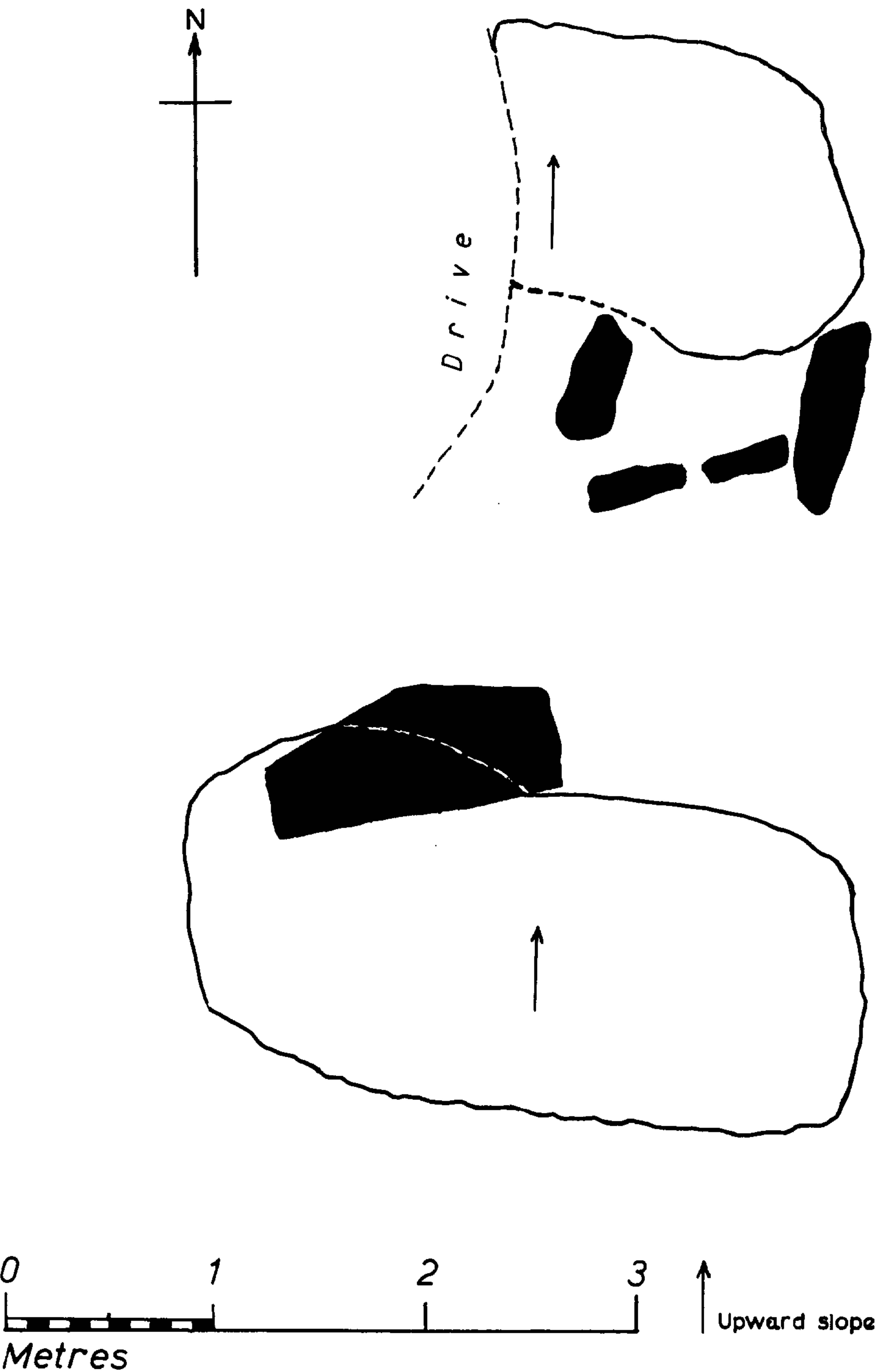
THE PURPOSE of this note is to publish for the first time an up-to-date description, plan, and bibliography of this site. It was discovered on or about 28 November 1811 by Rev. John Skinner, rector of Camerton, who interpreted it as 'the Capstone of a demolished Cromlech. . . It was entirely by chance I discovered this British remain so similar to those I noticed in my Anglesea Tour (Skinner 1802/1908), and my subsequent visits to the spot have more and more confirmed the opinion I then formed' (Skinner 1812). He revisited the site on at least two later occasions (Skinner 1818-19 and 1826?), but unfortunately it has not been possible to relate the references in his Index to his *Journals* with the present volumes which have been rearranged and rebound twice since his Index was compiled. The site was first published, as a 'Druidical remnant of antiquity', by Seyer (1821), from information supplied by Skinner who was among the subscribers to his *Memoirs . . . of Bristol*.

When discovered the site was in a field, which about 1880 was incorporated in the grounds of Druid Stoke House. In 1904 this land was sold in lots for residential development. By 1907 the present house had been built, called 'Cromlech' from that date onwards, as the stones are included in its front garden where they form a sort of rockery. The house is 59 Druid Hill. Arrangements were made for interested persons to have access to the monument by courtesy of the owner and tenant (Pritchard 1907), but there is no legal right of way as has occasionally been stated. An interesting aspect of the site's history is the extent to which the outmoded attribution to the Druids has become incorporated in the local nomenclature. The first edition of the 1-inch O.S. map (1830) shows the site as 'Stones', but the edition of 1878-84 reflects the antiquarian thought of the time by showing it as 'Druidical Stones'. On recent large scale maps and plans this has been amended to 'Burial chamber (remains of)'. Between 1930 and 1937 the suburb of Druid Stoke was developed, including within it Druid Road, Druid Stoke Avenue and Druid Hill, all named from the monument. During the late 19th century an annual assembly of a sect of 'Druids' was held there (Scott 1905).

The site (ST 561762) is about 42 m. above Ordnance Datum, on a westward spur of Durdham Down overlooking a stream leading to the River Trym, itself a tributary of the Bristol Avon: an attractive situation such as was favoured by the builders of neolithic long barrows. It is about 1 km. SSE. of the find-spot of the Westbury-on-Trym hoard of early bronze age bronze implements, now in Bristol City Museum. It is near the junction of Druid Hill and Druid Stoke Avenue. The area is Old Red Sandstone but quite near the Carboniferous Limestone of the rest of Durdham Downs to the south.

The stones comprising the monument were described as of dolomitic conglomerate by Prof. C. Lloyd Morgan, sometime Professor of Geology (later Vice Chancellor) at Bristol University (Were and Way 1913). This identification has recently been confirmed by Dr. Michael Crane, Assistant Curator in Geology, at the City Museum, Bristol. They are probably of local origin and most likely from either Henbury or the foot of Kingsweston Hill.

The site was explored from 8 to 10 September 1913 but no finds appear to have been made except a buried stone, and no plan was published (Were and Way 1913). The plan in Seyer (1821) does not show all the stones now visible. With such a history the site cannot be interpreted with any certainty, and there is now no trace of any mound which might have enclosed the stones. However, the northern group appears to be a burial-chamber c. 1.35 m. by 0.9 m. with capstone 1.9 m. by 1.4 m; and the southern group comprises a massive capstone 3.0 m. by 1.7 m. and 0.75 m. thick, supported by at least one upright slab of much smaller dimensions. This might be the remains of either an entrance portal (real or false) or another burial-chamber. The site is presumably the last vestige of a chambered tomb of Cotswold-Severn type, but precise classification within that group must await eventual excavation. However it seems most likely to have



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been a long barrow with a blind or false entrance and one or more laterally placed burial-chambers entered from the long sides of the mound.

Folklore relating to the site was noted by Skinner, who was informed by a local farmer of the tradition that in the past there were two giants, one residing at the Rock at Henbury where Blaise Castle now stands, and the other at St. Vincent Rocks in Clifton. One day the giant of Henbury, in a rage, threw a large stone at his rival, but it fell short of its target in the spot now occupied by the large capstone at Druid Stoke. It is possible to give this tradition more substance from other sources. The giant of Blaise Hill was Goram, whose Chair (ST 559781) is a rock formation shown on the O.S. maps above the River Trym to the south. The giant of St. Vincent Rocks in Clifton was named Vincent and is commemorated at the Giant's Cave (ST 565732) beneath the Observatory on Clifton Down. Both were known at the beginning of the 18th century (Atkyns 1712, 188), and the giant of Clifton can be traced back to the time of William Worcester. In Somerset the giant Gorm (surely a variant spelling of Goram) is associated with the Giant's Grave long barrow at Holcombe (Grinsell 1976, 99), Maes Knoll Iron Age hillfort and the Somerset Wansdyke (Tongue 1965, 127-8).

A model of the Druid Stoke monument, by John Maine, A.R.C.A., is in Bristol City Museum. The writer is grateful to the late Prebendary H.L. Bothamley for his enthusiasm, which stimulated the preparation of this account; to Mrs. Frances Neale for information from William Worcester's 'Description of Bristol'; and to Mr. M.W. Ponsford for the survey on which the plan is based.

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A LATE ROMAN SIGNET-RING FROM CIRENCESTER

A signet-ring of copper alloy (See figure and plate VI c) was found, recently, in the front garden of No. 28, Tower Street. It has now been placed on loan to the Corinium Museum by Mr. Marshall, the owner.¹

Although the hoop is now broken and distorted it can be seen to consist of a ribbon of metal with a maximum width of 8 mm. at the shoulder. The rectangular bezel (10 × 11 mm.) is 4 mm. deep and has slightly undercut sides. It carries an intaglio device showing a bird with a long

1. Ac. No. 1976/51. I am indebted to Mr. David Viner for information about the site where a number of coins have been found in the past. Mr. David Brown had the ring photographed in the Ashmolean Museum and Miss. Pat Clarke provided a drawing.