

# Hautville's Quoit

**A solitary stone, a rerouted road, and a mysterious mound**

**John Richards**

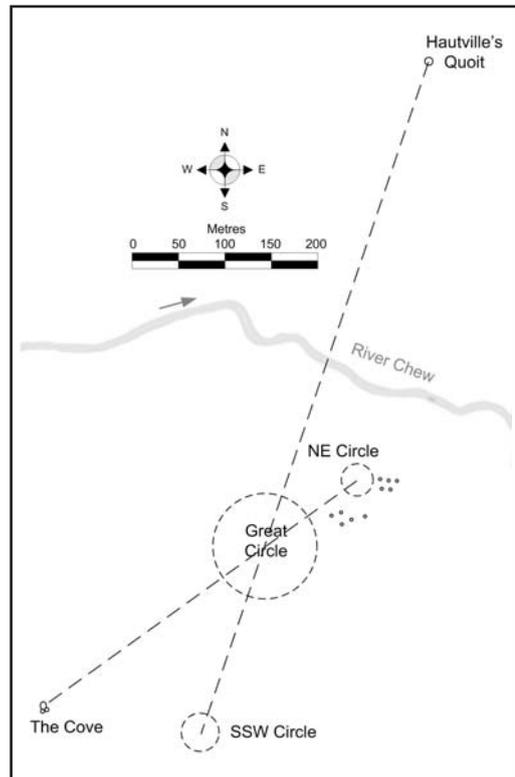
**A**fter two seasons of investigations at the Stanton Drew circles and the Cove (Oswin et al 2009; 2011), attention shifted to an “outlier” stone. To the northeast of the monument, 500m away across the River Chew, is Hautville’s Quoit, a stone that lies very nearly on an alignment through the centres of the Great Circle and the South-southwest Circle (see Figure 1). It was known that Roger Mercer conducted excavations and geophysical survey on the Quoits in 1969, and we knew that he had not found much.

The local story of how a giant, Sir John Hautville, threw the stone from a nearby hill has been told by many sources. In 1664, John Aubrey was the first to relate how Sir John had thrown the Quoit from Norton Hill half a mile away (Aubrey et al 1980). Stukeley (1776) moved the pitching point to the Iron Age hill fort of Maes Knoll, just over 2km distant. Wood (1765) added the story that Maes Knoll was created by one spadeful of earth dropped there by Sir John.

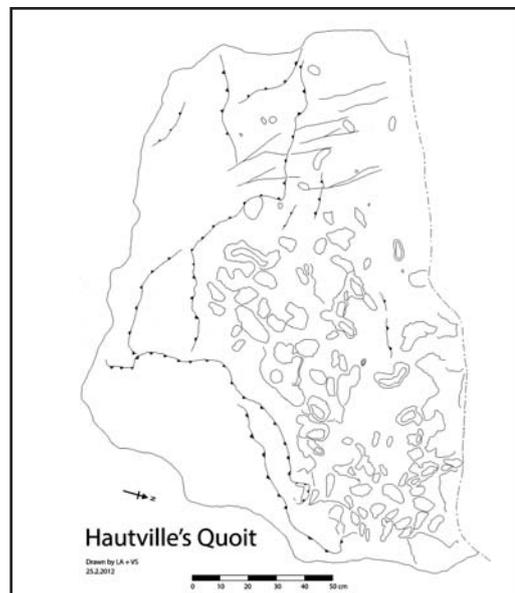
In reality, Sir John Hautville is said to have been granted the manor of Norton by Edward I as a reward for his services in the Holy Land (Wood 1903). Sir John felt this was insufficient recompense and named it Norton Malreward; the reaction of the king to this ingratitude is not known.

The Quoit (see Figure 2) is situated on the northern edge of a field bordering the B3130 Chew Magna-Pensford road. Part of the stone lies hidden beneath the field boundary hedge, but the visible portion is about 2.1m by 1.4m. Lynn Amadio and Vince Simmonds produced an excellent drawing of the stone (see Figure 3). Dymond (1896) gives the size of the Quoit

**Figure 2**  
Hautville's Quoit, looking northwards (20cm divisions on scale).



**Figure 1**  
Alignments of the Stanton Drew circles and stones. Figure 3 below Hautville's Quoit.



as 2.1m by 2.0m by 0.6m. It is quite possible that the portion of the stone under the hedge extends by 0.6m, which would mean that the stone is still the same size as seen by Dymond. Stones do have an unfortunate tendency to shrink over time as lumps get broken off for road mending or building.

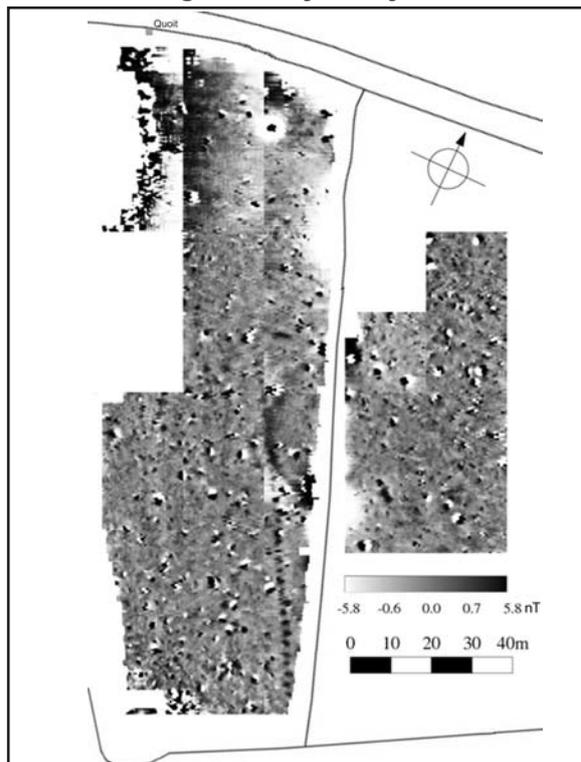
The magnetometry and resistance surveys were mostly inconclusive. The magnetometry (*see Figure 4*) showed a curved feature halfway down the field, but we do not know if it has any archaeological significance. The straight line running down to the bottom corner is a drainage pipe. Around the Quoit itself we found areas of low resistance that we were later able to show corresponded to Mercer's excavations. However, we think we found the original course of the road!

Eighteenth century accounts and illustrations indicate the Quoit lying in or next to the road. The Quoit is now on the field side of the roadside hedge, so either the Quoit or the field boundary has moved, but it also seems likely that the course of the road itself has changed. The resistance survey (*see Figure 5*) showed a band of high resistance about 10m wide running parallel and adjacent to the road. This band of high resistance was also seen near the surface in two resistance profiles. There is a small ridge or lynchet running west-east and the band corresponds to the northern side of this lynchet. It is likely that this is the original course of the road (*see Figure 6*) and the lynchet was the original road side.

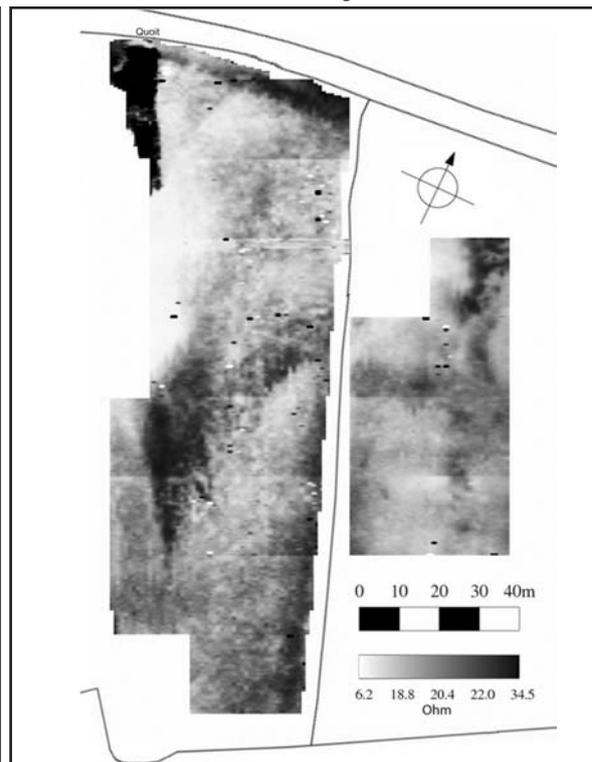
The lynchet continues into the next field, though diminished, and runs down towards the stream, where there is a possible earlier bridge site alongside the current bridge: stone footings are visible on the far bank. The most likely time for the road to have been diverted is after 1814 when an Act of Parliament added the road to those controlled by the West Harptry (sic) Turnpike Trust. A new road and bridge could have been constructed alongside the old. The dogleg in the field boundary by the bridge suggests that the new road used the old bridge for a time until the new bridge was built.

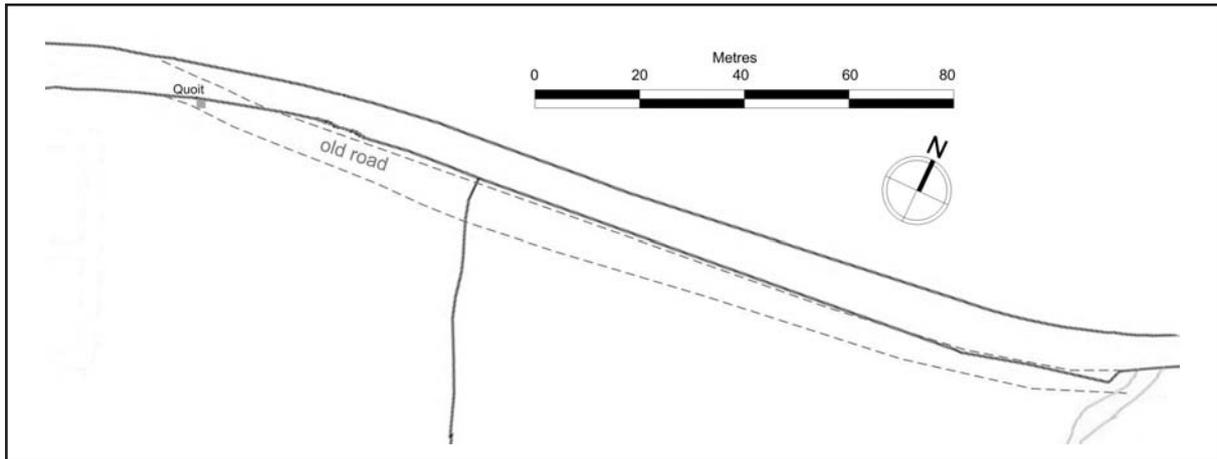
Below the field containing the Quoit, there is a large field of approximately 10 hectares known as Big Ground which runs gently downhill to the River Chew. Three-quarters of the way down the field, a long low mound-like hill sits with its long axis across the slope (*see Figure 7*). The mound has a striking appearance. It is elliptical in shape, 125m by 90m, with its flat top measuring 40m by 25m, at a height of 40m OD. When approaching on the downhill slope in Big Ground it rises 2m, and then

**Figure 4**  
Quoit Farm magnetometry survey.



**Figure 5**  
Quoit Farm resistance survey.





**Figure 6**  
Possible original course of road.

**Figure 7**  
The mound in Big Ground, looking southwards.



falls 4m on the far side to re-join the slope running down to the river. The long axis is oriented  $65^\circ$  from true north. From the top of the mound there would be a fine view of the stone circles 200m away, if it were not for the line of trees bordering the River Chew. This led us to wonder whether the hill could have had some significance in the Neolithic landscape. In 2013, we plan to return to find out.

A full report (Richards, Oswin and Simmonds 2012) is available from the BACAS website.

## References

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