

Archaeologists rewrite history of the Trefael Stone

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Aerial-Cam image of the site. Credit: Adam Stanford

The Trefael Stone, a scheduled ancient monument in south-west Wales originally thought to be an ancient standing stone is actually the capstone of a 5,500-year-old tomb, according to new research from an archaeologist at the University of Bristol.

Excavations of the site in an isolated field near Newport by Dr. George Nash and colleagues indicate that the 1.2m high stone once covered a small burial chamber, probably a portal dolmen, Wales' earliest Neolithic burial-ritual monument type.

The stone bears multiple cupmarks, circular holes gouged into its surface associated with ritual burial activity in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. As the stone's shape suggests that of a capstone, the archaeologist Frances Lynch, writing in 1972, suggested the site could be a possible dolmen site. However, no geophysical survey or excavation was carried out –

until now.

As the first [archaeologists](#) to fully investigate the site, Dr. Nash and his colleagues Thomas Wellicome and Adam Stanford found a further 30 cupmarks of varying size and quality on the stone, along with an array of prehistoric artefacts that has led the team to suggest that this site was more than just a standing [stone](#).

From last year's excavation season the team unearthed sherds of pottery which appear to date from the late Neolithic; two perforated, water-worn beads similar to those found at the [Early Mesolithic coastal settlement site at the Nab Head](#) on the Pembrokeshire coast; and the remains of human bones. The archaeologists plan to conduct radiocarbon-dating and other tests on these remains when the required permissions have been granted to remove the bones.

Dr. Nash said: “The [excavation](#) of this monument gives archaeologists a rare insight into the ritual-funerary activity of Britain's earliest farming communities. What is more significant is the survival of pottery and human bone from this period within such acidic soils.”

A burial site of this age is very rare as intense farming practices since the seventeenth century have destroyed many ancient sites. Further excavations are planned for September this year.

More information: ‘Transcending artistic ritual boundaries, from dolmen to menhir: The excavation of the Trefael Stone, South-west Wales’ by George Nash, Adam Stanford, Isabelle Therriault and Thomas Wellicome in Adoranten

Provided by University of Bristol

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