



# IN THE ROUND

One of Britain's most iconic heritage sites celebrates a big birthday this year. **SUSIE KEARLEY** went to Stonehenge in Wiltshire to investigate the story of the prehistoric monument, gifted to the nation 100 years ago



**SALISBURY CLUB SITE** regulars will know how well-placed the Wiltshire campsite is for exploring a range of historic attractions. Right next door is the Iron Age settlement of Old Sarum, while Salisbury Cathedral is a 40-minute walk or short bus ride away. However, the biggest attraction for many visitors is the famous stone circle of Stonehenge, just under nine miles away.

This year, Stonehenge celebrates 100 years since it was given to the nation by Sir Cecil Chubb. He bought the henge on a whim in September 1915 with 30 acres and gave it to his wife as a present. She'd reportedly sent him to buy curtains, so was unimpressed when he returned home having spent £6,600 (about £650,000 today), on a pile of old rocks and the surrounding landscape.

The henge was in a pretty bad state at the time. Visitors had been chipping bits off to take home, and the stones were starting to fall over - many were propped up with wooden poles. Then on 26 October 1918, Cecil gave Stonehenge to the nation and restoration work began.

As interest in the monument grew, scientists, archaeologists, and the public alike were all fascinated by it. A variety of theories about its purpose were put forward: was it a temple to pagan gods, a healing centre or a burial site?

Archaeologists found chalk pits at Stonehenge containing the cremated remains of people who'd been laid to rest there between 3100 and 2140BC, so it was certainly used for burials. It was also used as a Neolithic calendar to mark the changing seasons: the sun rises over the Heel Stone on 21 June every year, marking the start of





## HEAD TO THE HENGE

Stonehenge benefits from a new visitor centre, where you're immersed in 360-degree projected images of the site, showing how it's changed through the ages. There's a fascinating exhibition, a recreation of the Durrington Walls settlement, a restaurant, and a shop.

Free shuttle buses take you from the visitor centre to Stonehenge, or you can walk 1.5 miles through the landscape, passing burial mounds en route to the monument. The stones were roped off in 1978 to prevent erosion, so you have to stick to the path, but you still get close enough to appreciate Stonehenge in all its glory.

A series of events to celebrate the centenary include talks, lectures, and a new exhibition opening in October. For details visit [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk) and search 'Stonehenge'.

**Please note:** Dogs are very welcome at Salisbury Club Site, but are not allowed at Stonehenge, and parts of the wider landscape prohibit dogs, owing to attacks on sheep.

summertime. Today, about 20,000 people visit Stonehenge for the summer solstice. Ancient druids worshipped at Stonehenge – some say they built it – and modern pagans still revere the sacred site today.

## STAND ON CEREMONY

Stonehenge was used for many ceremonial purposes, including rituals celebrating the seasons, fertility ceremonies, and celebrations of life and death. Important meetings were probably held at the henge among ancient lawmakers, and its purpose may have evolved over the years to suit the people and societies that lived nearby. It was certainly a place of pilgrimage and awe.

In 2014, researchers from the Royal College of Art suggested that Stonehenge 'may have been a giant musical instrument'. With permission from English Heritage ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)), they used a crystal hammer to produce a sweet enchanting sound. Each standing stone, when tapped, produced a different pitch, leading the researchers to question whether the stones were selected for their musical qualities. The sounds could be heard for miles. Were they used like church bells, they pondered, to call people to gatherings or worship at Stonehenge?

Recent archaeological digs found a 'ritual arena' of 90 standing stones buried under the southern bank of nearby Durrington Walls. Then a Neolithic enclosure was discovered at Larkhill in Wiltshire, predating Stonehenge – it may have been home to the architects of the Stonehenge landscape. Bronze Age carvings on some stones show Roman activity at the henge, and in May 2016 researchers dragged stone boulders on a sycamore sleigh across logs, concluding that moving the stones was easier than they'd expected.

In March 2018, English Heritage suggested that the construction of Stonehenge was a great ceremonial occasion, as important as its intended use. Communities from across the country gathered to build Stonehenge as part of a huge celebration. Historic stone-moving ceremonies in parts of Asia added weight to this idea.

Today, you can explore the Neolithic landscape, following in the footsteps of early man, and don't miss the visitor centre, where free shuttle buses run to the henge. Walk from Stonehenge to Woodhenge and Durrington Walls. Or walk from Avebury Henge along West Kennet Avenue to the Sanctuary. It's worth taking a look inside West Kennet Long Barrow and visiting Silbury Hill while you're there. 🚗



To book your pitch at Salisbury Club Site in Wiltshire go to [www.myccc.co.uk/salisbury](http://www.myccc.co.uk/salisbury) or call 024 7647 5426.

From far left: English Heritage celebrates Stonehenge's centenary; visitor-centre exhibits; atmospheric at dawn and dusk; replica Neolithic huts on site; the new visitor centre

