

THE LITTLE BOOK OF
STONEHENGE



ENGLISH HERITAGE
STONEHENGE



MICHAEL O'MARA BOOKS LIMITED

INTRODUCTION

Standing proud and mysterious on a southern English plain, Stonehenge is famous around the world. Its trilithons – the two upright stones capped by a horizontal lintel – form an iconic image that symbolizes prehistory and the ancient past.

Everyone who loves to wonder about our distant ancestors is intrigued by this enigmatic, ruined stone circle and the other monuments that make up its wider ritual landscape. But although new discoveries are made every year, we still do not know why Stonehenge was built or how it was used by the many generations of ancient Britons who shaped it over hundreds of years.

Some antiquarians thought it was built by the druids, others said it was the ancient Egyptians, while it has even been claimed that it was an alien landing site.

Was it a place of sacrifice, a healing centre, or perhaps a prehistoric astronomical calculator?

This *Little Book of Stonehenge* covers the essential facts and all the theories, but focuses on the site in popular culture. For hundreds of years the stones have been a tourist destination, and artists, musicians, writers, and filmmakers have all been inspired by their image. From painters such as J.M.W. Turner to cartoon characters, and from comic book heroes to royalty, Stonehenge has been the source of art, poetry, music and ideas.

From ancient myths to the adventures of Doctor Who, this book is a fun, alternative way of exploring what Stonehenge has meant to creative minds throughout the centuries.



WHAT IS STONEHENGE?

Stonehenge is one of the most famous ancient monuments in the world. Its trilithons – two upright stones capped by a third, horizontal, lintel stone – are instantly recognizable. It is usually described as a stone circle, but Stonehenge is far more than just a circle of stones, and the ruins that are so well known today are only part of a much more complex structure.

THE FIRST STAGE

The first part of today's Stonehenge was a circular earthwork enclosed by a bank and ditch, formed out of the underlying chalk around five thousand years ago. At roughly the same time a circle of small pits was dug near the inner edge of the bank. Known as Aubrey Holes after the antiquarian who first discovered them in the seventeenth century, some of these are indicated today by small markers. The Aubrey Holes may have contained upright posts or stones, and most of them held human remains, cremations of the dead. More cremations were found in the surrounding ditch. The first Stonehenge was a cemetery.

