The Clutton Stone - Somerset

At around 120 kg (265 lb), the Clutton Stone is a remarkable example of a stone whose history is closely connected with working life and the traditional testing of strength. Located at Dagger Wood near Clutton, Somerset, the stone is believed to date from the eighteenth century and appears to have originally served a practical agricultural purpose.[1]



Figure 1. The Clutton Stone – 121kg.

The stone is thought to have been made as a stable stone, probably from locally available Bath sandstone. Its raised and shaped form is believed to have helped keep hay. Its construction has been attributed to the eighteenth century, around the period when the associated farm was becoming established.[1]

Once its original practical purpose had passed, the stone acquired another role. During the first half of the twentieth century, it is remembered as becoming an informal test of strength among farm workers, particularly during haymaking. At a time when much of the work was carried out by hand, haymaking was physically demanding labour, involving the cutting, gathering and loading of hay without the machinery used today.[1]

According to the surviving family account, farmhands would attempt to lift the stone during periods of downtime. Those who succeeded could reportedly receive a small reward, such as cider or cheese.[1] The story provides an unusually clear picture of how a heavy stone could become part of working rural culture: not as a formal competition,

but as an informal challenge between people accustomed to demanding physical labour.



Figure 2. Antique illustration - Farmer lifting a stone overhead.

This makes the Clutton Stone particularly interesting when considered alongside other traditional lifting stones. Its significance does not depend solely upon the weight of the object or the achievement of a famous strongman. Instead, the stone appears to have been incorporated into the social life of the farm, providing a simple and tangible way for workers to test their strength against one another.[1]

The stone is also associated with Harold “The Bull” Dagger, who is reported to have lifted it in 1884.[2] This account forms part of the later tradition surrounding the stone, although the surviving evidence does not allow every detail of the feat to be independently verified. It is therefore more appropriate to describe the 1884 story as a recorded local tradition rather than established fact.

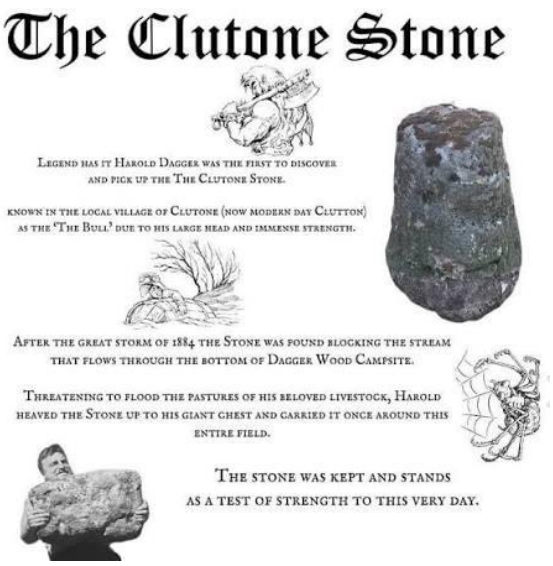


Figure 3. Harrold Dagger poster.

The Clutton Stone's agricultural history provides an important context for these stories. It was not created as a modern strength implement; it was an ordinary working object that subsequently acquired significance through the people who used it and the strength challenges that became attached to it.[1]

Its story has continued into the modern era. The stone has been incorporated into Clutton's Strongest, where competitors have been challenged to lift it from the ground, bring it to the chest and shoulder it. The competition has also included an overhead-press challenge for the 120 kg stone.[3]

The continued use of the stone demonstrates how an object can move from practical agricultural use into living tradition. The Clutton Stone has passed through several stages: first a piece of farm equipment, then an informal test of strength among agricultural workers, later an object associated with the story of Harold Dagger, and now a recognised challenge within modern strength culture.

For English Stonelifting, the Clutton Stone is therefore significant not simply because it is heavy. Its importance lies in the relationship between stone, work and community. The surviving account of farmhands attempting to lift the stone during haymaking provides a glimpse into a form of strength culture that existed within everyday rural life, rather than solely within organised sport.

The stone also illustrates an important principle when researching historic lifting stones: the object and the story surrounding it should be treated separately. Some elements of the Clutton Stone's history are based on surviving family recollections and physical interpretation, while other details belong to later tradition. Preserving both is valuable, provided the distinction between documented evidence, recollection and folklore remains clear.

Today, the Clutton Stone continues to be lifted. What was once a practical agricultural object has become a link between the physical culture of the past and the strength traditions of the present, an old stone still providing a test for new hands.

References

[1] *The Clutton Stone* — historical account from Dagger Wood describing the stone's eighteenth-century origins, its use as a stable stone and its later role as a strength challenge among farm workers during haymaking.

[2] Old Man of the Stones, *Clutton Stone* — historical and traditional account connecting the stone with Harold “The Bull” Dagger and the reported 1884 lifting.

[3] Strength Register, *Clutton's Strongest 2023* — details of the modern Clutton Stone strength challenge, including the 120 kg stone and its ground-to-chest, shouldering and overhead-press challenges.