

SGI 38 Harrow Sarsen Boulders

London Borough of Harrow

Ownership: London Borough of Harrow

Grid reference: various – see below

There are three known sarsen boulders (silcrete) that are publicly accessible in Harrow. They are:

- A. The Weald Stone, A409 High Road, Wealdstone, outside the *Bombay Central* restaurant, formerly the *Red Lion* and the *Weald Stone Inn* public house (grid ref. TQ 15087 90838, postcode HA3 6HS)
- B. Outside *The Hare*, A409 Brookshill at the junction with Old Redding and Clamp Hill, Harrow Weald (grid ref. TQ 1482 9292, postcode HA3 6SD)
- C. In Pinner Memorial Park, by the main path through the park (grid ref. TQ 1199 8952).

The **Weald Stone** (Loc. A) has been recorded in written records going back to the 16thC¹. It is half-buried with the B-axis upright, and the visible part consists of pebbly silica-cemented sandstone otherwise known as silcrete. As the bedrock is London Clay here, it must have originated from sediment that has been eroded away or from elsewhere. Suggestions¹ were that it was 'transported in glacial drift from Hertfordshire', or 'associated with prehistoric man in the area' perhaps to mark the burial site of a chieftain. The former is unlikely since there is no evidence that ice ever reached this part of London, unless the boulder was perhaps moved by meltwater or solifluction (mass movement downslope under freeze-thaw conditions). The association with 'prehistoric man' (as sarsen stone was used to build Avebury and Stonehenge etc.) cannot be proven. However, stones have been used to mark local boundaries or trackways. Boundary markers were necessary in medieval times in defining individual ownerships and common fields of the manor, to prevent encroachments.

The Stone traditionally gave its name to the locality of Wealdstone², which expanded considerably from a small hamlet around a farm in the 60 years after the coming of the London & Birmingham Railway in 1837. In addition to the suggestions above, the Stone has been thought to mark the boundary between the parishes of Harrow Weald and Harrow. 'Weald Stone' is marked on [John Rocque's 1757 map of Middlesex](#)³ and on [his 1754 map](#)⁴ but the earliest references to the boulder are in the Harrow Court Rolls and come from the early Tudor period. They refer to nearby residents fined for not cleaning a 'ditch' or 'runnel' running past the Stone, possibly a tributary of the nearby Wealdstone Brook, which flows into the River Brent, both marked on Rocque's maps. The 1754 map shows more clearly the Wealdstone Brook rising near what was The Kiln brickfield (marked 'Brick kiln'), perhaps issuing from the base of the Stanmore Gravel.

The Stone was rediscovered when the second *Red Lion* was being built in c.1834 (the first *Red Lion* dated from the early 18thC). The builder, one William Smith, found it while digging out the old foundations for a cellar – evidence that by this time, the Stone had sunk into the ground. Mention was made that the ground was often wet, or it had slumped into the ditch. Smith embedded the Stone into the corner of the new inn and from this time, perhaps it may have been used as a mounting block. The present premises date from 1934 and became the third *Red Lion*, which by the early 2000s had been renamed the *Weald Stone Inn*. Today,

the Stone is several metres in front of the former pub and in 1983 it was [listed](#) Grade II by Historic England.

Little information has been found about the history of the other two boulders.

That outside **The Hare** (Loc. B) sits upright next to the pub sign in a small garden in front of the 18thC building⁵. Like the Weald Stone, it may have been a marker for the same trackway that has become the A409.

The boulder in **Pinner Memorial Park** (Loc. C) lies beside the pathway between the Chapel Lane car park and the pond adjacent to the Heath Robinson Museum and café. It was originally in the rear garden of a house on nearby Cannon Lane where at least one boulder is still present⁶. This garden backs onto the river Pinn.

Formation^{7,8,9}

Silcrete is a surface or near-surface deposit of soil, sediment, rock or weathered material that has been cemented by secondary silica to form an indurated mass. A genetic classification of silcretes has been proposed i.e. paedogenic types associated with silicification in the soil profile, and non-paedogenic types encompassing groundwater and evaporitic modes of formation. The latter classification has been proposed for most silcretes in the southern UK based on:

- The absence of complex profile structures
- tabular morphology and
- the simple nature of cementation.

Silcrete formation involves three elements: a silica source, silica transport, and silica deposition. The source of the silica is unclear, but leaching of feldspar, and clay-rich sediment in acidic weathering environments is the most likely mechanism for producing sufficient dissolved silica. It is probable that the silica was derived both internally, within the host sediments, and from adjacent clay-rich sediment, consistent with the composition of the Lambeth Group. Microcrystalline quartz is the most common cement type for the silcrete boulders described here.

It is generally accepted that silicification of sediments to form the silcretes in this area occurred during the deposition of the Lambeth Group c.56-55 Ma. This period saw the event known as the Paleocene-Eocene Temperature Maximum (PETM) when global temperatures were raised by ~6°C above those that were already quite high, warming near-surface groundwaters in turn aiding silicification. This event lasted about 200 ka including the rise in temperature which took about 20,000 years.

Geology

None of the boulders are in situ. The bedrock geology of the immediate area around the **Weald Stone (A)** comprises the Paleogene (Eocene epoch) **London Clay Formation (Thames Group)**¹⁰, a marine unit deposited c. 54-48 million years ago which underlies most of Harrow. The older **Lambeth Group** (56-55 million years) occurs in the Pinn valley¹¹ and above an anticline which brings the Chalk close to the surface in northern Pinner and

towards Northwood. There appears to be no evidence for sarsen stones originating from the London Clay, including the sandier **Claygate Member** (forming the London Clay's youngest sub-division). The latter outcrops c. 1.2 km to the E and N – respectively the highest point of Stanmore Golf Course ('Bell Mount' on old maps such as Rocque's) and on the higher parts of the South Hertfordshire Plateau. This is capped by the **Stanmore Gravel Formation** of early Pleistocene or Plio-Pleistocene age, resting on the Claygate Member, and in Harrow occurs on Harrow Weald Common and Stanmore Common. The nearest part of the gravel is about 1.5 km away to the north.

As mentioned above, the Stone may have migrated from the South Hertfordshire Plateau by natural means or possibly brought here by human agency. The origin of the pebble content within the Stone is uncertain but it could lead to a suggestion that it may have come from the Stanmore Gravel. It is probably more likely that it could have formed within sediments which have been lost to erosion.

The **stone outside the Hare (B)** lies on or near the contact between the Claygate Member and the Stanmore Gravel. Again, the origin of the boulder is unknown, and could also have come from sediments now eroded away.

The original location of the boulder in the **Pinner Memorial Park (C)** lies on the Paleogene Lambeth Group (age c. 55 Ma), the Pinn having cut down into it. The boulder has several holes in it which may have been formed by roots. The sediment forming the boulder may be from sands of the Reading Formation within the Lambeth Group, which forms surface outcrops above the Pinner Chalk Mine workings.

Access

All have good public transport access. If using trains, for locations **A & B** go to Harrow-on-the-Hill station on the Metropolitan and Chiltern Lines, take the College Road exit (right from the gate line) and turn left to Harrow Bus Station next door. Alternatively go to Harrow & Wealdstone served by the Bakerloo Line, Overground (Lioness Line), and a few London Northwestern fast services from London Euston. Turn right at the top of the stairs to exit. For location **C** go to Pinner on the Metropolitan Line.

From Harrow Bus Station, for **A** take the 140 (dest. Harrow Weald), 182 (dest. Harrow Weald Oxhey Lane), or 340 bus (dest. Edgware station), alighting at Long Elmes (stop WS). These buses serve stop WL (Weald Lane) to return to Harrow. For **B** take the 258 bus, alighting at Brookshill Gate (before The Hare) or Sandringham (after The Hare). The bus back to Harrow stops closer to The Hare (Clamp Hill stop).

From Harrow & Wealdstone station, for **A** take the 140, 182, 186 or 340 bus from stop G (Wealdstone Centre) reached by exiting left from the station. For **B** take the 258 bus from stop G. Alighting stops as above.

C is a short walk from Pinner station and bus stops on Bridge Street (served by 183, H11, H12 & H13). Walking from both the station and bus stops involve crossing roads and the Chapel Lane car park entrance.

From Pinner station turn left and walk down to the main road. Turn right and cross the entrance to the High Street (that leads up to the church). A little further on, use the zebra crossing to enter Chapel Lane. Go under the bridge and cross the car park entrance into the park. You will soon see the boulder to the right of the path. From the northbound bus stops (Stand Z1: 183 or D, Love Lane: H11, H12, H13) alight to left towards Chapel Lane. From the southbound stop (C: Pinner station, 183, H11, H12, H13) alight to right and use the zebra crossing to enter Chapel Lane.

Car access: Loc. A has limited street parking in side roads; B is 500m from the Harrow Weald Common free car park off Old Redding, with footway access on the same side of the road. Otherwise use the Hare car park if buying food and drink there. C is close to the car park off Chapel Lane (parking is payable except in the evening).

References

1. Davenport, P., 1948. The Weald Stone. Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, Vol. 10, 165-171. London. Bishopsgate Institute, Bishopsgate E.C. This article contains most of the information that has been found on the Stone. Some of it is repeated in other local history books on Harrow. The article is available online at <https://www.lamas.org.uk/archives/23-transactions.html>.
2. Gover, J.E.B., Mawer, A. and Stenton F.M., 1942. Volume XVIII, The Place Names of Middlesex, apart from the City of London. The English Place-Name Society, University of Nottingham.
3. John Rocque's map of the County of Middlesex, 1757, scale 1 inch to 1 mile (1:63,360), London Metropolitan Archives (available to view on londonpicturearchives.org.uk).
4. John Rocque's map of the County of Middlesex, 1754, scale 1 inch to 1 mile (1:63,360), available to view on layersoflondon.org.uk.
5. Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (Eds), 1991. The Buildings of England, London 3: North West. Penguin Books.
6. Harrow and Hillingdon Geological Society – pers. comm. The boulder is included in the Pinner Building Stones Walk available on the HHGS [website](#).
7. Dixon, J.C., 2022, in Treatise on Geomorphology, Second edition (Ed.-in-Chief J.F. Shroder). Elsevier Inc.
8. Gutiérrez-Castorena, M.C., Effland, W.R., 2010, in Interpretation of Micromorphological Features of Soils and Regoliths (Eds: G. Stoops, V. Marcelino and F. Mees). Elsevier B.V.
9. Huggett, J. and Longstaffe, F.J., 2016. A brief account of new petrographic and isotopic insights into the Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire Puddingstones of SE England. Proceedings of the Geologists' Association 127, 327-336.
10. British Geological Survey, [Geology Viewer](#).
11. *Ibid*.

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(1 & 2) Loc. A: The Weald Stone o/s the Bombay Central restaurant-bar (ex-Red Lion then Weald Stone Inn), A409, Harrow Weald, 3.5.2019. Photos: Peter Moore, Harrow & Hillingdon Geological Society.



(3 & 4) Loc. B: O/s The Hare (slab arrowed), A409 Brookshill at j/w Old Redding, near Harrow Weald Common, 3.5.2019 (3), 18.4.2019 (4). Photos (3) Peter Moore; (4) Allan Wheeler.



(5) In Pinner Memorial Park, 15.6.2016
Photo: Allan Wheeler.