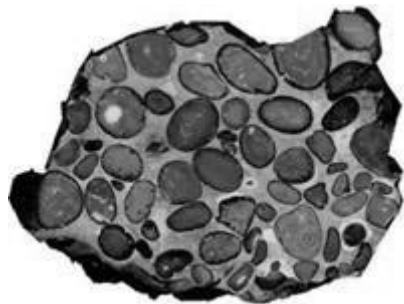


Puddingstone, witches and a safe game of cricket...

As we know, Nomansland was named because the Abbeys of St Albans and Westminster couldn't agree where their common boundary was – each laying claim to Nomansland Common. The argument was settled and a puddingstone was put in place to mark the boundary. It now marks the boundary between Wheathampstead and Sandridge.

Unfortunately the stone has, over the years, been covered over and the little that is visible is a danger to cricketers as it is located in the outfield and is also very difficult to find. Our cricket club has been doing very well recently and they are moving up the league. Unfortunately the pitch will not reach the required standard which may prevent them from progressing. This is partly because of the stone.

The club would like to move the stone further along the parish boundary towards the road so it is more visible and no longer a hazard. It is an historic object so we need the support of the St Albans senior archaeologist and, of course, Sandridge Parish Council. The first problem is to find out just how big and heavy the stone is!



The distinctive rock is largely confined to Hertfordshire. Despite a superficial similarity to concrete it is entirely natural and derives its name because it resembles Christmas pudding. **Hertfordshire puddingstone was credited in local folklore with several supernatural powers, including being a protective charm against witchcraft** – it was sometimes referred to as Hag stone or Witch stone. Parish records from Aldenham relate

that in 1662 a woman suspected of having been a witch was buried with a piece of it laid on top of her coffin to prevent her from escaping after burial. It is also used for jewellery and milling grain. It is sometimes referred to as Growing Stone because farmers believed it grew in fields.

Puddingstone is a conglomerate sedimentary rock composed of rounded flint pebbles washed out of chalk beds over 60 million years ago, transported to beaches where they were rounded by wave erosion and graded by size. A lowering of sea levels and general drying drew out silica from surrounding rocks into the water immersing the flint pebbles. Further drying precipitated the silica which hardened around the pebbles trapping them in the matrix. The result is that the rock is uniform and breaks straight across the pebbles giving a pleasing surface that can be polished for decoration.

Have you got some in your garden?