

## The Judith Stone

The Judith Stone sits in a field in the north-northwest of the parish of East Farndon, and is a glacial erratic boulder. It is known locally as the Judith Stone, and is thought to be named after Countess Judith, who was the niece of William the Conqueror.



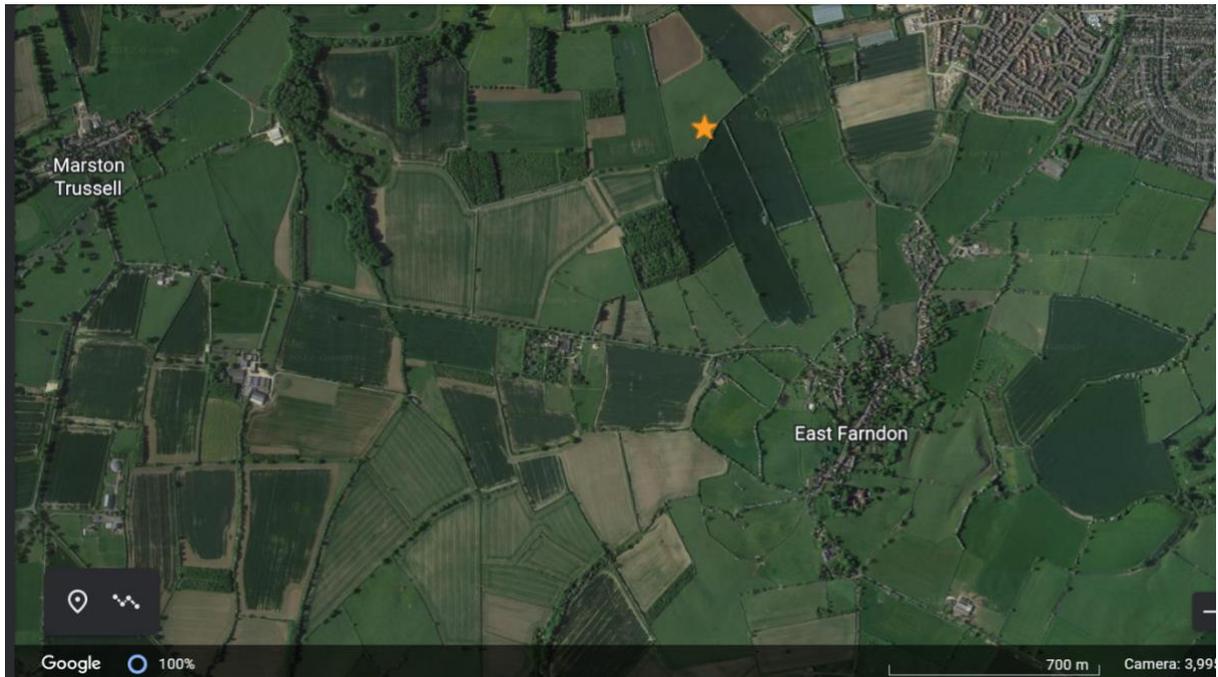
Map reference: SP7120786000

Lat: 52.467306N

Long: 0.953256W

Dimensions: The boulder is 1.5 metres long, 1 metre wide and just under 1 metre high.

## Where to find the Judith Stone:



## Where did the stone come from?

The Ice Age began in Britain about 33,000 years ago. At its peak, around 22,000 years ago, a large sheet of ice covered all of Scotland, stretching as far down south as the Midlands, including Northamptonshire. About 15,000 years ago, the climate warmed rapidly and dramatic landscape changes occurred: the glaciers melted, moraines (ice-transported debris)

were deposited and vast amounts of meltwater poured across the landscape, which is when glacial erratics such as the Judith Stone were left on the land. Displaced rocks and sediment are a lasting legacy of the glaciers and a great source of information about the past.

### **Why is it called the Judith Stone?**

In 1066, William I set sail from France, defeating Harold at the Battle of Hastings to become England's first Norman King, usually known as William the Conqueror. He regarded all land as being his to allocate as he chose, and East Farndon was subsequently divided between four 'tenants-in-chief', one of whom was his niece, Countess Judith. It seems almost certain that the boulder known as the Judith Stone was on the land allocated to her.

Countess Judith had land-holdings in 10 counties across the Midlands and East Anglia, and with so much land, it's doubtful that she ever visited East Farndon, but the boulder was almost certainly named after her because it was on her land.

There are thoughts that it may have been a boundary marker as her land was close to the Leicestershire border, but there is no evidence to support this, and it is more likely that she was simply given land with the boulder on.

### **Who was Countess Judith?**



Judith was born in Artois, Pas-de-Calais, France, in 1054. Her parents were Lambert II, Count of Lens and Adelaide of Normandy, Countess of Aumale (sister of William the Conqueror).

Judith was aged 12 at the time of the Norman invasion of England in 1066. A year after the invasion, William returned to France, taking with him English nobles he didn't trust. Among these men was Waltheof Siwardsson, Earl of Huntingdon and Northampton, who was aged 21 and of Danish descent. It was in France that Waltheof met 13-year-old Countess Judith of Lens, William's niece.

In 1068, after Waltheof helped William quash an uprising in Exeter, he was released from house arrest. Later that year, Judith arrived in England for the coronation of William's wife, Duchess Matilda, who was crowned Queen of England at Westminster Abbey.

The following year, Waltheof joined the Danes, who had taken the city of York, and he fought against the King. In order to turn Waltheof into an ally in the future, William agreed to him marrying his niece, Judith.

They married in 1070 and had three children: Maud/Matilda, Judith/Jude and Alice Adeliza.

In 1075, Waltheof once again joined a revolt against William. It is thought that he was betrayed by Judith and he was executed in 1076.

Afterwards, Judith founded Elstow Abbey, Bedfordshire, All Saints Church, Kempston and Hitchin Church. She died in 1086 in Lens, Pas-de-Calais, aged 32.

### **Further Information about the Judith Stone:**

The following information is taken from *Folklore of Northamptonshire* by Dr Peter Hill FSA. Dr Hill has done a great deal of research on glacial erratics.

*Occasionally one finds a large boulder of a stone not native to the area, usually of granite or quartzite. This is likely to be a 'glacial erratic', a stone deposited during the upheaval of the Ice Age, rather than something transported by human means from another place. Where they occurred – either in a field (as at East Farndon), or in a street (as at Gretton) – they were regarded with wonder by our ancestors from prehistoric times to as late as the early nineteenth century, and treated as special 'hallowed' places for the conducting of judicial matters such as settling disputes, business dealings, speeches, or other matters where an oath, agreement or promise of some kind was made – something to be honoured.*

The following information is taken from *Secret Northamptonshire* by Dr Peter Hill FSA.

*In the extreme north of the county, in a ridge and furrow field near East Farndon, lies the Judith Stone, a large granite boulder lying in a hollow, which is believed to mark an assembly point where tribes met on important occasions during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Being on elevated ground with sweeping views, the site was obviously of strategic importance and would have been part of a communications network across the hills of the county in times of danger. The stone gets its modern name from Countess Judith, the niece of William I, who owned a great deal of land in the county.*

Mike Lee lives in East Farndon and completed a degree in Physical & Economic Geography and Geology in London. He is a semi-retired designer of product and customer communications systems, writer, geologist and geographer, steam roller owner, and roller and steam locomotive driver!

His father Graham Richnor Lee was an Industrial Chemical Engineer, qualifying at UCL in 1933. His interests included geology and he examined the Judith Stone, and with Geological Sciences consent, took a sample in 1962. It was confirmed by the G S Institute to be a Cairnsmore of Fleet type granite. This is acknowledged in the 1968 “Geology of the Country Around Market Harborough” Geological Sciences Institute Memoir.

Mike has written the following:

So far as the Judith stone is concerned (and some other Lowestoft period glacial erratics locally), my father and I – at that time as a callow student of geology, geography, hydrology, and landforms, so I was learning a lot – got support from the Geological Survey to map, collect samples for analysis and matching. We particularly focused on the Judith Stone, and the erratic on the crestline of the ridge between Sutton Bassett and Weston by Welland, to the east of the B664 and identified these as being derived from the Cairnsmore of Fleet granitic mass between Newton Stewart and New Galloway. We also carried out the same process on the hillside-located erratic to the east of the Theddingworth to Mowsley road.

This stone is of Yoredale shales origin. These items were being carried by the glaciation ice flows, but as the ice melted in the post glacial change period, they became stranded. There are many more in the area, as there are large deposits of moraine debris, again giving evidence of their areas of origin. Moraine is essentially smaller rocks, produced by erosive power, which forms a dump at the end of a glacier if its retreat is arrested for a period. If you know mid-Wales and the Fathew valley reaching inland from Tywyn, there is very prominent moraine at Abergynolwyn, above it another moraine forms Tal-y-llyn lake.

I was also always told that the Judith Stone was used as a landmark and datum point. Its location, and that of its neighbours, is of particular interest in terms of the influence of the melting ice caps on the surrounding landforms and scenery. Farndon is located at the outcrop of the lower Jurassic succession, which dips away to the South East.

This sedimentary outcrop of clays, lime and sandstones runs south from the Cleveland Hills in Yorkshire, almost due south through Lincoln and then passes into Leicestershire and Rutland via the Belvoir escarpment, encompassing the Tilton Hills e.g., Robin-a-Tiptoe, John Ball Hill and right down to Honey Hill in Northamptonshire. The outcrop continues through Edge Hill to the Cotswolds and the Quantocks, disappearing into the English Channel by Golden Cap in Dorset.

During the melting of the ice caps, this range of hills, plus ice caps, spread from the Welsh Mountains to the west and the northern mountains and Derbyshire hills. As the ice gradually melted a huge trapped inland sea developed between the Jurassic Hills and the western and northern uplands, which has become known nowadays variously as “Lake Harrison” or “Lake Bosworth”. Movement of the ice sheets virtually stopped.

As a result, many of the erratics were left stranded – as with the Judith Stone – and the area between Charwelton, Naseby, Sibbertoft, Walcote and High Cross became a source area for rivers like the Cherwell (Thames), Nene, Welland, Avon and Soar, which can be easily seen on maps or by visiting the area. One other reminder of this glacial demise has left a striking reminder of the huge volumes of melt water. This has left many of these small rivers with massively oversized valleys – e.g., the Nene near Brixworth and its other branch at Badby,

the Welland between Harborough and Duddington, the Avon from Welford to Stanford on Avon and the huge flood plain of the Soar Valley north of Crow Mills.

The huge valleys are today normally drained by seemingly insignificant watercourses and therefore termed as having “misfit drainage”. However, it is worth noting that the Welland and its valley at Harringworth necessitated the longest river valley crossing viaduct in Britain, requiring no less than 82 arches and is 1,275 yards long. The Welland is around 3 yards wide at this point – some misfit!



Article written by Judy Hodgetts – December 2022