

Maumbury Rings

Celtic henge?

**Roman
amphitheatre?**

**Civil War
army camp?**

Maumbury Rings was all of these, and a place for the people of Dorchester to gather for circuses, fairs, executions, political meetings and town celebrations. It can accommodate a crowd of around 12,000 people.

‘Maumbury’

Maum

Of uncertain meaning; possibly Old English *meal*m, meaning ‘chalky soil’ or *maene*, meaning ‘common’ (perhaps referring to the gatherings of people in a common place) or Celtic, *main* meaning stone.

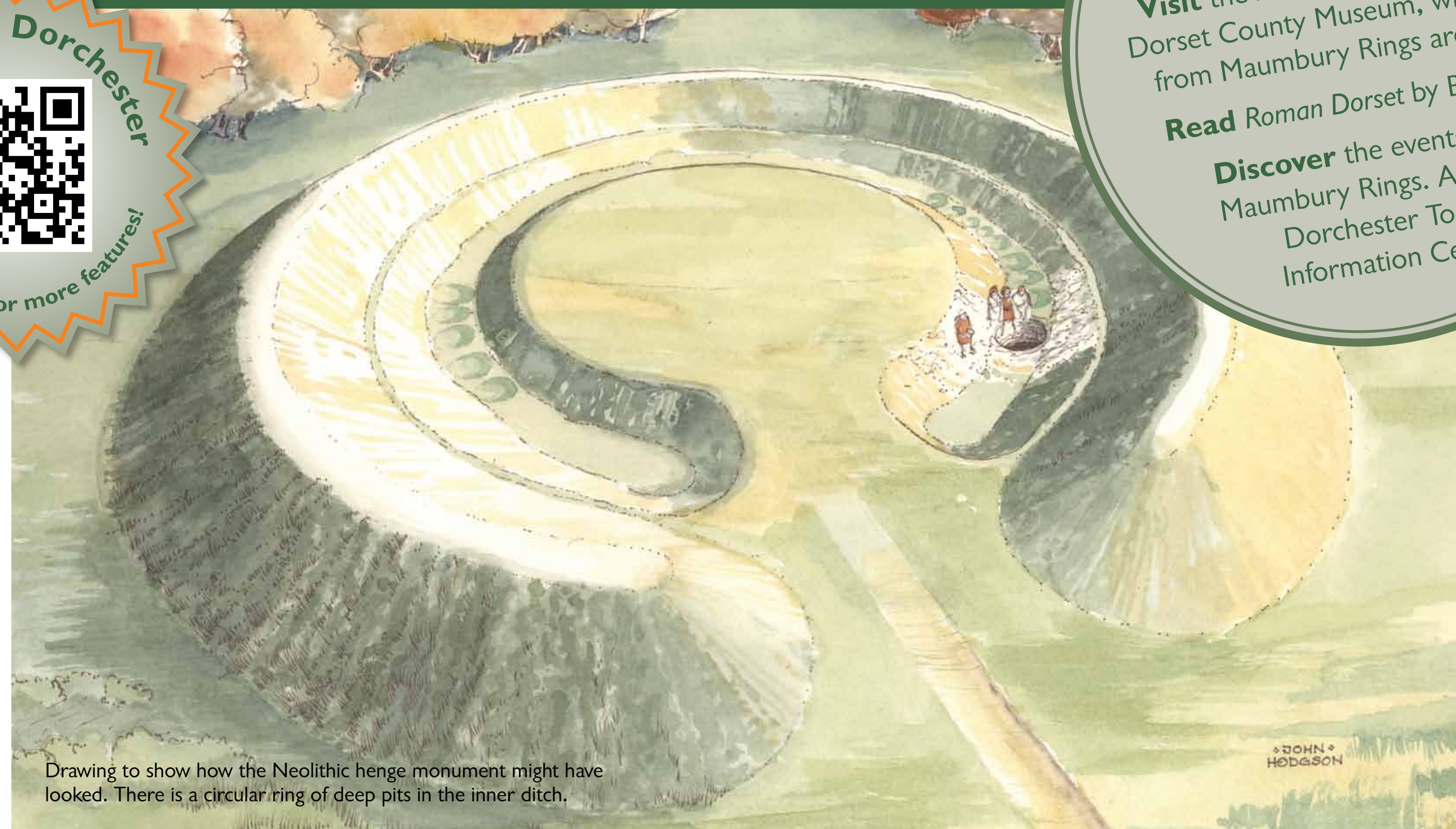
Bury

From the Old English burgh, meaning ‘earthwork’. (It also means ‘town’.)

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Drawing to show how the Neolithic henge monument might have looked. There is a circular ring of deep pits in the inner ditch.

The Henge

When Maumbury Rings was excavated by Harold St George Gray in 1908-1913, it was discovered that before Roman times there was a prehistoric henge here, with roughly the same outline that you can see today. Henges are circular monuments - like Stonehenge - made of a bank with an inner ditch.

Archaeologists discovered deep pits dug into the bottom of the circular ditch. More than 4,500 years ago Neolithic people used picks and shovels made of deer antlers and brought the chalk to the surface using baskets on ropes. There are thought to be 45 pits, but only eight have been excavated.

Around the ditch and the pits was a bank, built with the material that was dug out.

Burnt material has been found in the pits, with carved chalk objects and human and animal bones. It is thought that the ceremonial centre in this area moved from Maiden Castle to Maumbury Rings and then to Mount Pleasant, just outside Dorchester. Unlike the other sites, there are no signs that anyone lived at Maumbury Rings and we do not know what ceremonies were carried out here.

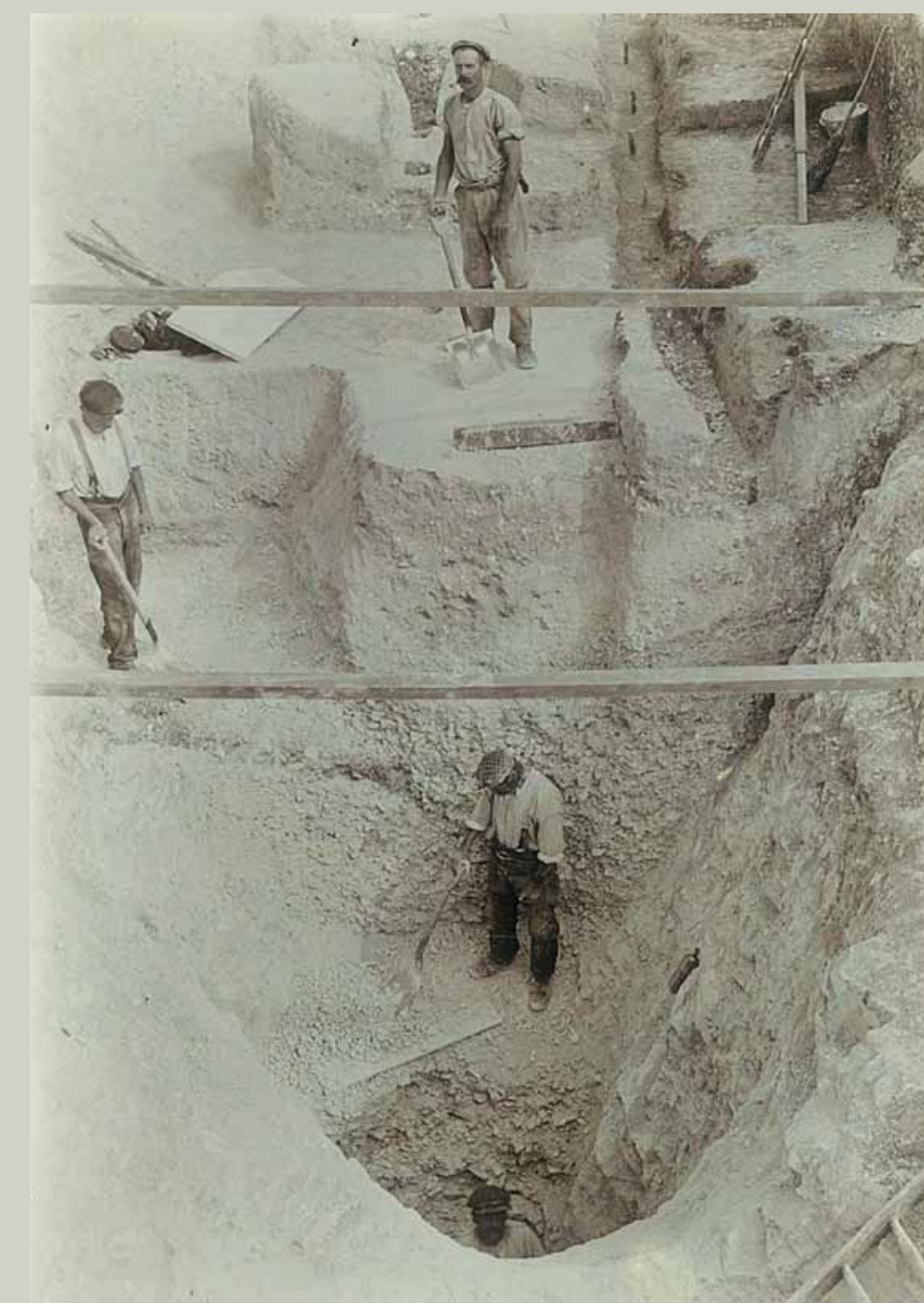
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Visit the Archaeology Gallery at the Dorset County Museum, where objects from Maumbury Rings are displayed
Read Roman Dorset by Bill Putnam.

Discover the events held at Maumbury Rings. Ask at the Dorchester Tourist Information Centre.



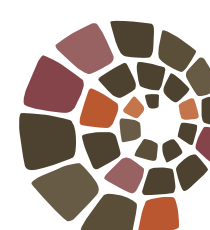
Excavations in 1908.
A partial section of the bank, cutting through Roman and Neolithic remains.



One of the excavated pits. The Neolithic pits were dug over 4,500 years ago using picks and shovels made of deer antlers. Roman posts are in the trench at the top of the picture.



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