Granite menhir or standing stone

This granite menhir or standing stone is a granite slab that has been shaped by carving and smoothing it into a stylised female figure. The entire surface of the stone has been dressed. The head and body are marked by shoulders and a crown, and in relief are a necklace and breasts. On the flat back, and towards the base, some form of belt or girdle has been carved. The function of standing stones is unknown but archaeologists believe that they are markers of special or sacred spaces. It is likely that many were destroyed over the centuries as land use changed. The menhir was discovered under the chancel steps of the Castel parish church in 1878. Its original position is unknown but it may have stood near other prehistoric monuments and then have been deliberately concealed in the church. Often the parish churches were built on much earlier sites.

It is the finest statue-menhir of its type and one of the best preserved. It is unknown when the damage to the right breast occurred but it may have been a Christian act against pagan idols. The menhir is 2m overall in height with 1.65m visible. Such figures are generally known to belong to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age c.2500-1800 BC.

Artist’s impression of the menhir being erected
Illustration by Brian Kyle