John Frere Encyclopedia Article

John Frere

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John Frere

1740-1807

British landowner and archaeologist whose 1797 description of stone tools found near Hoxne, Suffolk, laid the conceptual foundations of prehistoric archaeology. Frere, a member of the London-based Society of Antiquaries, theorized in a letter to the society that the tools had been made by a people far older and far more primitive than the ancient Britons described in Roman chronicles. Frere's insistence on the tools' great antiquity, and his use of their geological context to roughly measure that antiquity, challenged established archaeological methods and theories and ultimately helped to create a new understanding of humankind's origins and early history.