

Neolithic to Early Bronze Age Resource Assessment The Isle of Wight

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Inheritance:

The map of Mesolithic finds on the Isle of Wight shows concentrations of activity in the major river valleys as well two clusters on the north coast around the Newtown Estuary and Wootton to Quarr beaches. Although the latter is likely due to the results of a long term research project, it nevertheless shows an interaction with the river valleys and coastal areas best suited for occupation in the Mesolithic period.

In the last synthesis of Neolithic evidence (Basford 1980), it was claimed that Neolithic activity appears to follow the same pattern along the three major rivers with the Western Yar activity centred in an area around the chalk gap, flint scatters along the River Medina and greensand activity along the Eastern Yar. The map of Neolithic activity today shows a much more widely dispersed pattern with clear concentrations around the river valleys, but with clusters of activity around the mouths of the four northern estuaries and along the south coast.

As most of the Bronze Age remains recorded on the SMR are not securely dated, it has been difficult to divide the Early from the Late Bronze Age remains. All burial barrows and findspots have been included within this period assessment rather than the Later Bronze Age assessment.

Nature of the evidence base:

235 Neolithic records on the County SMR with 202 of these being artefacts, including 77 flint or stone polished axes and four sites at which pottery has been recovered. Other site types include one mortuary enclosure, two long barrows, seven lithic working sites, 3 occupation sites, one midden and one hearth and more recent additions include 6 trackways, two post built structures, a platform and part of a submerged forest which have all been scientifically dated as part of the Wootton-Quarr project (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

There are 454 records of Early or mid Bronze Age on the County SMR. That these consist of 324 barrows (157 bowl barrows, 7 round barrows, 9 Bell barrows, 3 Disc barrows and 85 ring ditches) as opposed to the 101 findspots and 28 other site types, shows the concentration since very early times on the visible earthworks of this period. Of the 28 other sites, 11 are wooden or hurdle structures which have been dated by scientific analysis, 3 are hoards, 7 are human burials, 1 midden and 1 pit, and 1 rectangular enclosure and bank, 3 lithic working sites.

Chronology:

Until the recent Wootton-Quarr coastal project, the dating of Neolithic activity on the Island relied on the morphology of the three standing structures and the typologies of stone tools assemblages. It is difficult to separate the typologies of Neolithic from Early Bronze Age and most previous assessments have necessarily identified the assemblages with a general Neolithic to Bronze Age date.

The recent English Heritage funded Wootton-Quarr project has recorded and analysed archaeological remains within a stretch of the northern coastal zone over a 12 year period and produced the first scientifically dated structures for the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age period on the Island.

One early Neolithic structure is dated to 4040 – 3710 BC (SMR 3643), with three others (SMR 5572; 5573; 5574) dating between 3790 – 3340 BC, which predates the beginning of the sea level rises resulting in the drowning of the oak forest (SMR 5571) dating to 3463-2557 BC. Six other structures dated to after the oak forests started to disappear between 3100 – 2490 BC, with the latest dated structure dating to the Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age transition at 2910-2040 BC (SMR 5646).

8 Early to Mid Bronze Age structures from the coastal zone have been dated by scientific analysis. With the earliest dating being between 2470 and 2140 Cal BC and the latest between 1530 to 1220 Cal BC, they provide a chronological point of reference in the chronology of Bronze Age activity on the Island.

Landscape and land use:

The concentrations of Neolithic activity appear to correlate with the coastal estuaries and three major rivers which is to be expected in the heavily forested early neolithic landscape. In addition it has been suggested that three downland burial sites may have been associated with settlement along the spring line at the foot of the scarp slope (Tomalin 1980). More recent evidence, especially from the Wootton-Quarr project has shown the concentration of activity within the coastal zone and the full utilisation of the coastal natural resources. (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

The lithic working sites show the usage of the natural sources of flint within the landscape and may help to define territories

Archaeological evidence for the Solent River level rise which eventually cut the Island off from mainland England ?

The earliest groups of Bronze Age barrows seem to be clustered around the heads of chalk combes, which are narrow valleys sheltered on three sides, possibly near the spring lines at the mouths of the combes (Tomalin 1980). The round barrows are almost entirely confined to the higher downland areas of the landscape and a re-assessment of the evidence 25 years after the last synthesis (Basford 1980) is long overdue.

In addition, the range of wooden structures recorded within the coastal zone (Tomalin et al forthcoming), gives a better picture of the range of landscape use with the full range of coastal and sub littoral resources being utilised in the Bronze Age.

Social organisation:

It has been suggested that the Tennyson Down mortuary enclosure and Afton Down long barrow, situated within 1.4 km of each other, are best seen as the work of a single social unit marking their existence amongst the forests on either side of the Western Yar gap (Tomalin 1980). This view would suggest another social group marking out their territory with the long barrow of which only the Longstone survives. The social organisation required to construct and use these communal burial places is considerable.

The Bronze Age barrow burials and cemeteries give some indication of the existence of different levels of society with those who lie buried under the monumental earthworks unlikely to have laboured to actually raise the earthworks.

The 3 hoards may provide evidence of metal working, but not how society was structured in relation to this skill.

Settlement

As yet the full range of Neolithic settlement indicators has not been identified on the Isle of Wight. Neolithic pottery found beneath a Bronze Age round barrow is said to indicate adjacent Neolithic settlement at Arreton Down, Niton Down and Week Down (Tomalin 1980). Tomalin also suggests that the surviving early Bronze Age cemeteries provide important indicators of inherited Neolithic territories.

Six Neolithic occupation sites have been recorded on the SMR to date. These include the continuation of settlement activity from Mesolithic to Neolithic recorded at Newtown estuary (SMR 558). Here Mesolithic implements were found on an old land surface in estuarine clay with overlying brickearth containing Neolithic and transitional flints (Poole 1936). But the coastal erosion which revealed this site is very rapidly destroying them too. The same site revealed a large variety of timber structures and other features when visited during 1999's Isle of Wight Coastal Audit (IWCAHES, 2000) and a radiocarbon date obtained from a hazel timber from Platform B of 2920-2500 cal BC, (GU-5341; 4160+/- 70 BP).

The continuity of settlement is indicated at other sites such as that at Black Pan Farm where Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flints were recorded (Poole 1936).

An early Neolithic date is given to the site at Lea Farm because of the distinct Mesolithic ancestry of the flint tools. A hearth surrounded by flakes, wasters and implements was recorded over an area of 70-80 ft in diameter. Tools found included leaf-shaped arrowheads, a semi-circular knife, scrapers and flakes (Poole 1938).

The survival of buried Neolithic land surfaces beneath Bronze Age barrows is long recognised on the Island. Traces of a late Neolithic settlement of Peterborough Culture were recorded beneath a barrow on Arreton Down, including 320- 350 sherds of Neolithic pottery, petit tranchet arrowhead, 1 leaf shaped arrowhead, 1 barbed and

tanged arrowhead, scrapers, blades, flakes and a discoidal knife, flint axes and a chopper. (Alexander and Ozanne 1960).

One possible Neolithic midden was recorded by members of the local archaeology society at Eaglehead Copse (IOWNHAS 1921).

A flint working site in Shorwell (SMR 385), excavated between 1963 and 1965, produced nearly 1200 waste flakes and over 400 worked flints, including scrapers, microliths, graters, burins, awls, a small pick, the tip of a leaf-shaped arrowhead (Bennet 1966 and 1967).

At Redcliff, a Neolithic site occupied a hollow formed from eroded Lower Greensand over Wealden clays. When first published in 1927 it was described as an early Neolithic site but is now known to cover a period from late Mesolithic to early Neolithic. Flint implements include picks, microliths, petit-tranchet derivatives, all types of scrapers, choppers, borers, piercers and hammer stones, with 3 hearths exposed and a fragment of Neolithic A2 pottery found at north end of site (Poole 1927). In the 1978 the site was subject to further excavations which revealed a Neolithic and Bronze Age working floor over an area of 65 square metres. The surface was covered with a large quantity of cores, waste flakes and implements. Late Neolithic sherds recovered from disturbed areas of the site are probably associated with a concentration of Neolithic flints on very edge of cliff, as the site lies six hundred metres west of a major island source of flint in the face of Culver cliff (Tomalin 1979).

There are no Bronze Age settlement sites recorded on the SMR.

The Built Environment:

The two earthen long barrows and mortuary enclosure are all that remains on land of the built environment of the Neolithic period. Within the coastal zone, ten wooden structures have been revealed by the Wootton-Quarr Project and they demonstrate part of the range of timber built structures produced during the Neolithic period.

Early Neolithic structures include three timber trackways at Quarr beach radiocarbon dated to Post 2027..1003103 (*Corylus* sp.) 4860±70BP, 3790-3380 cal BC (GU-5663); Post 2027..1003104 (*Corylus* sp.) 4730±80BP, 3700-3340 cal BC (GU-5664); Post 2027..1003105 (*Ulmus* sp.) 4800±60BP, 3780-3370 cal BC (GU-5662); Post 2027..1003106 (*Acer* sp.) 4770±50BP, 3700-3370 cal BC (GU-5660); Post 2027..1002910 (*Betula* sp.) 4790±50 BP, 3700-3380 cal BC (GU-5596); Post 2027..1003102 (*Acer* sp.) 4780±60 BP, 3700-3370 cal BC (GU-5661). In addition a possible V-shaped fishtrap lay within a palaeochannel with one post radiocarbon dated to 4040-3710 cal BC, 5100±60 BP, (GU-5251).

Later Neolithic wooden structures include a timber trackway at Newtown on the north western coast with a radiocarbon date obtained for a hazel timber from Platform B of 2920-2500 cal BC, (GU-5341; 4160±/ 70 BP). A double alignment of posts with associated hurdling at Binstead Beach has had two posts radiocarbon dated to 4180±50 BP, 2920-2600 cal BC (GU-5695) and 4120±60 BP, 2900-2490 cal BC

(GU-5696). A further curvilinear double alignment of small posts at Binstead is possibly a trackway, but no horizontal timbers survive, although two posts radiocarbon have been dated to SZ 4270±70 BP, 3040-2620 cal BC (GU-5340) and 4140±50 BP, 2900-2510 cal BC (GU-5582). A cluster of posts straddling estuarine silts and organic silt/peat on Quarr Beach could possibly be the remains of a jetty or causeway and has had one post radiocarbon dated: Post 1000009 (willow), 4350±50 BP, 3100-2890 cal BC (GU-5257). Another structure at Quarr Beach consisted of parallel posts and possible corduroy platform within intertidal silts with two posts radiocarbon dated: 2027..1002912 (*fraxinus* sp.) 2910-2490 cal BC, 4120±70 BP (GU-5697); 2027..1002913 (*fraxinus* sp.) 2460-2040 cal BC, 3790±50 BP (GU-5698).

Finally a Y-shaped setting of 19 posts within palaeochannel silts at Quarr has had one post radiocarbon dated: Post 2027..1000011 (Hazel), 4340±50 BP, 3100-2780 cal BC (GU-5259).

Whilst the visual impact of the Bronze Age barrows within the landscape would have shaped the built environment during this period, there is evidence for other structures such as the post built structures recorded within the coastal zone and a rectangular enclosure and bank.

The Early Bronze Age structures within the coastal zone include a group of posts forming a waisted open-ended rectangle approximately 2m x 1m at Binstead Beach. The posts included oak, ash, hazel and elm, all roundwood and two have been radiocarbon dated to Post 2027..1001072 (Hazel) 3710±60 BP, 2300-1940 cal BC (GU-5337), Post 2027..1001075 (*fraxinus*) 3480±50 BP, 1940-1680 cal BC (GU-5601). Another oval setting of posts measured approximately 2.5m x 1.5m and comprised 28 roundwood posts ranging in diameter from 30-120mm. The density of posts possibly suggests renewal and repair and two posts have been radiocarbon dated Post 2027..1001264 (hazel) 3590±50 BP, 2140-1780 cal BC (GU-5338), Post 2027..1001277 (*Sambucus*), 3450±50 BP, 1900-1670 cal BC (GU-5600).

At Pelhamfields Beach a cross shore line with some random posts was recorded within estuarine silts. Of the 32 roundwood posts recorded, one was radiocarbon dated Post 2027..1002309 (*Corylus* sp.) 3840±50 BP, 2470-2140 cal BC (GU-5384).

Another Early Bronze Age structure was an alignment of pegs set along the axis of a silt-filled header channel at Fishbourne Beach. One hazel peg protruding from silt at -1.56m OD radiocarbon dated to 3650±50 BP, 2200-1890 cal BC at 95% confidence (GU-5051). Date provides a terminus post quem for sea level rise from the base level of the channel. Contemporary lithic material has been recovered in close proximity.

Quarr Beach provided a rectangular post setting at Mean Low Water Mark with one *alnus* sp. post radiocarbon dated to 2140-1780 cal BC, 3590±50 BP (GU-5408). A further group of 6 posts were recorded in the intertidal zone at Quarr. One post was radiocarbon dated to 1740-1410 cal BC, 3270±70 BP (GU-5336). Another group of posts on this beach were recorded as forming an hourglass shape at MLW and one *salix/populus* sp. post was radiocarbon dated to 2110-1750 cal BC, 3560±50 BP (GU-5412).

Another dated Early Bronze Age structure fell out of the eroding cliff, rather than being founding the coastal zone. Part of a woven hurdle panel made from debarked Alder and hazel was radiocarbon dated to IWSMR 4931..1001 3632±21 BP (KI25780) and IWSMR 4931..1002 3583±22 BP (KI25781).

A later trackway on Pelhamfields Beach has been radiocarbon dated to the Middle Bronze Age. It comprised a double row of posts approximately 1m apart, aligned NW-SE, associated with very fragile hurdling, within very soft mud. Posts included roundwood, radially split and squared timbers of oak, alder, birch and hazel. Probably used to bridge a creek or soft mud. Two posts have been dated to Post 2027..1003035 (Betula sp.) 3150±50 BP, 1530-1310 cal BC (GU-5665), Post 2027..1003050 (Alnus sp.) 3090±50 BP, 1510-1220 cal BC (GU-5666).

A possible Bronze Age field enclosure has been recorded along the summit of Luccombe Down. Surviving as general N-S or E-W low and narrow boundary banks which could form a parallelogram enclosure about 80m wide by 130m long. One of these banks is also overlain by two Bronze Age barrows, but the earthwork remains undated. The project Archaeologist suggests that there is evidence for an Early Bronze Age enclosure on top of the down (Currie 2002).

Ceremony, ritual and religion:

Three communal burial sites are known at Tennyson Down, Afton Down and the Longstone.

The Tennyson Down mortuary enclosure is an oval earthwork aligned east-west overlooking the sea on the south west coast of the Isle of Wight. With a central area 24m east-west and 9m north south, it is surrounded by a bank 5m wide and 0.25m high, when measured from inside the enclosure, with a gap 2.5m wide on the east side. Surrounding the internal bank on its east, west and south sides, is a ditch 4m wide and 0.4m deep. The height from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the bank is 0.5m, and there is a gap in the ditch on the east side corresponding to the gap in the internal bank. On the north side of the monument the ditch appears as an extended shallow pit which blends into the contours of the hillside with no obvious north edge. First recorded in 1940 (Grinsell and Sherwin 1940), further archaeological work was carried out in 1989 when a section revealed by a World War II trench bisecting the monument was examined. A sample of wood charcoal sieved from the primary infill of the flanking ditch of the monument gave a radiocarbon date of 3980±70 years BP. This date calibrates to approximately 2865 to 2290 cal BC (Sample no 56.5.2, OxA 3076).

The long barrow on Afton Down is conspicuously sited on the sky-line from the South and out to sea, faces uphill within a later Bronze Age barrow cemetery currently part of a golf course (RCHME 1979). The top of the mound has been flattened during construction of the golf course, when the ditches were also presumably levelled. The mound is orientated ENE-WSW and irregularly tapering in plan, with the broader end to the ENE, is 43m long and 1.2m high in transverse profile. Trenches were cut into the two ends of the mound by the Rev. J. Skinner in 1817 but produced no information (Skinner MSS, quoted by Grinsell and Sherwin).

"The Longstone" is the name applied to two massive blocks of ferruginous sandstone of the Upper Greensand and an associated low earthen mound to the west. These are the remains of a long barrow set on the crest of a steep south facing slope within 2km of the south coast of the Island. The barrow mound is 31m long, 9m wide and varies in height between 1m at the east end and 0.2m at the west. Two large sandstone blocks are set on the east end of the mound. The upright stone is c 4m high and too large to have formed part of the burial chamber while the recumbent stone is 3m long. Flanking the north side of the barrow mound are the traces of a ditch from which material was quarried during the construction of the monument. This survives to a width of c 3m and is 0.2m deep. The ditch S of the mound is believed to survive as a buried feature (RCHME 1979).

The site was partially excavated by J. Hawkes in 1956. Finds included a sandstone kerb revetment on the north side of the mound as well as a flint scraper and two sherds of pottery believed to be contemporary with the monument (Hawkes 1957).

Over 200 Bronze Age burial mounds placed in cemeteries on the higher downland areas within the landscape. A re-assessment of the 200 or so barrows within the Island's landscape and the funerary and ritual practices of Early to Mid Bronze Age is overdue.

Warfare, defences and military installations:

No evidence recorded on the SMR for these themes for Neolithic or Early Bronze Age

Material culture:

The Neolithic flint working sites (SMR 385, 450, 585, 796, 1002, 2037 and 4776), the possible flint mining site on Brading Down (SMR 1014) and all of the artefact scatters and find spots on the County SMR need to be re-assessed.

With 101 findspots of Bronze Age tools, 3 possible lithic working sites at which Neolithic and Bronze Age activity are recorded and pottery, as well as the artefacts recorded from burial barrows, are-assessment of the material culture within the British and European context is long overdue on the Isle of Wight.

Crafts, trade and industry:

No evidence recorded on the SMR for these themes during the Neolithic, but . 3 Early Bronze Age hoards have been recorded on the County SMR.

A Hoard of Arreton Down type artefacts was found at Moon's Hill 1942, including 3 spear-heads, 3 daggers and 7 flanged axes in a low bank associated with a layer of dark earth with fragments of wood and decayed twigs (Sherwin 1942). It is possible that this deposition was a founder's hoard or a ritual deposit.

An Early Bronze Age hoard of 17 or 18 weapons was found on Arreton Down in 1735 and comprised 3 unornamented flanged axes, a decorated flanged axe, an ogival

dagger, a 3 ribbed dagger, 9 tanged spear-heads, a tang and socket spearhead and one or two socketed spearheads. 2 of the flanged axes, the ogival dagger, one socketed and 4 tanged spearheads survive in the British Museum(Sherwin 1936). The remainder of the hoard is lost but a drawing of the implements by Sir Charles Frederick is preserved at the Society of Antiquaries (Piggott 1947). The composition of the hoard suggests votive deposit of the period transitional between the Early and Middle Bronze Ages

Transport and economy:

No evidence recorded on the SMR for these themes.

Legacy:

The landscape defined by both the Neolithic communal burial monuments and the later Bronze Age barrow cemeteries would have survived into and thus influenced later settlement and land use. In particular the re-use of Bronze Age burial mounds for secondary burials in the Early Medieval period indicates their influence upon later human land uses choices in a particular location.

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