

## Late Bronze Age to Iron Age Resource Assessment for the Isle of Wight

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### Inheritance

The Isle of Wight has surviving landscapes of early to mid Bronze Age barrows on the three chalkland areas of Afton/Brighstone Downs; Asheys/Brading Downs and Week/Luccombe Downs which it has been suggested show that the early Bronze Age population was concentrated in these areas (Basford 1980). In addition, Early to Mid Bronze Age Ceramic forms and usage have been shown to range from European Bell Beakers from burial mounds on Arreton Down (Clarke 1970) to the “Dorset” bowls from antiquarian and more recent barrow excavations (Thorpe 1882a and b; Tomalin 1979 and 1991).

Earlier Bronze Age metalwork assemblages (e.g. the Arreton Down tradition dating to 16<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) from the Island illustrate industrial patterns and may show maritime trade and as well as demonstrating operation of social hierarchy.

In addition, the Isle of Wight’s geological and topographic landforms provided many locations with access to several types of specialist ecozones. Mid Bronze Age occupation evidence from the Undercliff shows how the specialised micro-environment was responsible for a hybrid diet and economy which continued into the Iron Age.

Obvious gaps and biases:

The antiquarian study of Bronze Age communities through their visible monuments has occurred on the Isle of Wight since 1237 and has led to a focus on burial sites rather than occupation sites. Focus on the earlier pottery vessel forms has also led to very little analysis of the mid to late Bronze Age corpus of material. In addition a high proportion of the cultural material and sites currently identified were excavated or studied before 1950 and a reassessment of both is long overdue. In particular a re-assessment of all material is long overdue for the transition from Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age. The Iron Age occupation evidence has been described as meagre (Basford 1980) and a re-assessment of this in the light of metalwork finds is long overdue.

Until the recent English Heritage funded fieldwork undertaken by the Isle of Wight County Archaeology Service at the Wootton-Quarr, there were no scientifically dated sites and the Island’s Bronze and Iron Age chronologies rested on stylistic interpretation of object and vessel form. Coastal erosion has destroyed most of the sites from which Late Bronze Age to Iron Age occupation material has been recorded in antiquity and continues to destroy unknown amounts of unrecorded archaeological remains from these periods due to the under resourcing of archaeological recording and the lack of opportunity to record coastal sites through the local government planning process.

### Nature of evidence base

With 31 sites or finds recorded on the SMR dated to the Later Bronze Age and 118 dating to the Iron Age, evidence for these periods is sparser than for other periods such as the earlier Bronze Age which has visible monuments within the landscape. Until recently, archaeological supposition about the Late Bronze Age occupation of the Island has been based on poorly recorded urnfield sites, metal objects and ceramic vessels and the non scientifically dated stratified occupation remains in the Undercliff. The Iron Age meanwhile is represented by a

wider range of archaeological remains including field systems, occupation sites, burials and coinage as well as a large assemblage of the local Vectis ware pottery forms currently assigned to an Iron Age to Roman date (Tomalin 1987 pp30-40).

Geographically, known archaeological evidence for Late Bronze and Iron Age activity is concentrated on the chalk ridge, around the two river valleys and along both southern coastal zones. At present only isolated coin finds have been recorded in the north of the Island.

Much of the archaeological evidence gathered by antiquarians remains unreliable. For example, of the seven Late Bronze Age urnfields recorded on the SMR, five were recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the remaining 2 in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Ceramic material survives from only two of these sites with the remainder surviving as documentary sources only.

The Vectis report reports identified sites and finds of the Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age transition as being extremely rare and very little new data from this period has been recovered in the intervening years.

A lack of securely stratified sites or structures has always hampered our knowledge of the Island's later bronze age settlement sequences. With only one hearth site (unpublished SMR 2234) at Combley Farm securely radiocarbon dated (OxA-5485; 2860±50 BP, and OxA-5486; 2860±50 BP), there has been too much reliance on find spots, and unanalysed occupation sites and middens (SMR 2650, 2656, 3429, 3875). However, the recent work carried out in the foreshore at Wootton-Quarr has provided evidence of two structures radiocarbon dated to the Late Bronze Age with a longshore post alignment at Fishbourne Beach (SMR 1526) dated to 800-400 cal BC (GU-5598; 2470±50 BP) and 780-390 cal BC (GU-5261; 2420±50BP), and a long parallel sided enclosure of ash posts on Binstead Beach (B79) dated to c14d (SMR 2027) 840-530 cal BC (GU-5339; 2570±60 BP) and 770-390 cal BC (GU-5577; 2390±50BP). Five wooden structures have also been securely dated by this project to two Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age date ranges, one between 840 and 390 cal BC and a second between 400 to 190 cal BC, as well as structures dating to the Iron Age to Roman transition, between 110 cal BC and AD cal 130 (GU-5263; 1970±50 BP) and (GU-5262; 1990±50 BP) (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

### Chronology.

A re-assessment of the later bronze age to Iron Age chronologies of both ceramic and metalwork finds is required for the Isle of Wight. In particular an analysis of known Iron Age coin finds would be very helpful to establish chronologies in relation to trade and maritime activity especially in the light of the finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The impact of such research on our understanding of Iron Age activity is shown when the numbers of newly recorded metal detected coins (over 200, including ingots) are compared to the 37 coin finds currently recorded on the SMR. In addition more scientific dates are required to set the chronology of this period firmly within the correct parameters and the chronology of settlements requires more research.

### Landscape and land use

The Later Bronze Age saw the use of the Island's many and varied landscapes with tree clearance linked with cooking pits and use of a watercourse at Whippingham (Network Archaeology 2005, pp 21-25) and the legacy of the landscapes of earlier bronze age barrows clearly visible on the chalk ridge running through the centre of the Island.

Large scale woodland clearance occurred during the Bronze Age which saw the creation of downland and heathland around the central and southern chalk downs where the barrow cemeteries were situated. Prehistoric field systems have been recorded on the chalk, indicating that some areas of chalkland were used for arable agriculture. The best preserved of these lies within Brighstone Forest (unpublished SMR 5116-5158). Pollen evidence for woodland clearance and agricultural activity in the late Bronze Age has been recorded on the clay soils in two areas north of the central ridge at Newnham Farm, Binstead (Scaife, R G forthcoming) and AP evidence reveal cropmarks associated with a ploughed out barrow near Thorley and Wellow on fertile soils overlying Bembridge Limestone (unpublished SMR2641 and SMR 2642).

Iron Age evidence for land use includes four field systems dated on stylistic grounds to the Iron Age to Roman periods. These are at Middle Barn Farm (SMR 718), Idlecombe (SMR 524), Mersley Down (SMR 991) and Ashley Down (Drewett 1970, pp33-56). Other sites have produced gullies and ditches (SMR 3965; 4035; 4159) which probably represent boundaries but for which too little evidence is available for secure interpretation as to land use. An earthwork enclosure on Castle Hill (Adams 1882, p133 and Currie 1999 and 2003) has been dated to the Iron Age on typological grounds and may be a stock enclosure but it has not been securely dated.

Recent Archaeological work at Wootton Quarr demonstrates the use of coastal resources in these periods and have provided the first scientifically dated evidence of structures. In particular, two structures recorded at Wootton-Quarr beaches on the north coast, one interpreted as a fish trap (SMR) are dated by Radiocarbon techniques to the Late Bronze Age and five wooden structures, one of 80 posts set at mean low water mark, are dated to the Iron Age (Tomalin et al forthcoming). The midden sites and hearths within the Undercliff and along the cliff faces on the south of the Island indicate use of coastal resources within a diverse economy utilising a real mix of land based and marine resources in both periods (MacInnes et al 2001). More analysis of the palaeo-environmental contents of these midden and hearth sites could lead to a greater understanding of the interaction between the human use of land and coastal based sites such as these.

### Social organisation

At present there is little evidence for later bronze age society, hierarchy and social interaction or indeed of aspects of domestic-life or land tenure. The partial recording of a potential Iron Age hillfort (unpublished SMR 3553) on top of the hill at Yaverland with post settings for roundhouses lying to the south beneath the hillslopes might suggest some form of social organisation, as could the fact that the Iron Age hillfort overlooks and probably controlled trade coming into Bembridge Harbour.

The origins of the Iron Age population of the Island are not known, nor are the political affiliations in the years before and after the Roman Conquest of Britain. With close numismatic links to both the Atrebates in Sussex and Hampshire and the Durotriges in the Dorset area, Suetonius records Vespasian's taking control of two powerful tribes and the Isle of Wight which is called "Vectis" for the first time.

### Settlement

In the past, it has been assumed that the surviving landscapes of early to mid Bronze Age barrows on the three chalkland areas of Afton/Brighstone Downs; Ashley/Brading Downs and

Week/Luccombe Downs were indicators of a continuance of Bronze Age settlement from the early part of the period. (Basford 1980) However evidence of middens and hearth sites from the Undercliff show that settlement in this micro-environment continued from Mid Bronze Age into the Iron Age. The hybrid diet and economy of these settlements and the securely dated timber structures within the coastal zone at Wootton-Quarr hint at the greater use of coastal zone sites than archaeologists have previously thought. In particular, archaeological survey of the landward zone around Wootton Creek showed that a small round barrow cemetery was constructed on the summit of a small hill indicating nearby settlement within a zone making use of several types of natural resources (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

Recently excavated sites have added to our poor knowledge of the Iron Age settlement types, particularly for hillforts. Excavations at Yaverland in 2001 revealed a triple ditch defensive system surrounding a large area on the hilltop overlooking Brading Haven, a possible Roman and Iron Age harbour (unpublished SMR 3553). Roundhouses, a collapsed wall and large quantities of Vectis ware and domestic waste were recovered from the floor of the hillslope lying underneath the hillfort. The only other potential hillfort site is the supposed unfinished promontory fort at Chillerton Down lying partially across the narrow point of along steep sided spur on chalk hills (Dunning 1947). Late Iron Age occupation is also associated with four of the Roman Villa sites, with all but one associated with the central chalk ridge. Finds from Brading, Combley, and Bowcombe (Tomalin 1987) suggest Late Iron Age occupation on and around sites which later became the focus for Roman villa constructions and it is tempting to suggest continuation of arable landscape management in some areas of the Island survived the transition from Iron Age to Roman authority.

Other evidence for Iron Age occupation is piecemeal with only one ditched enclosure with associated ditches being positively identified as Iron Age at Knighton and that remains unpublished (Basford 1980 pg29). Some occupation structures were recorded in the 1930's and 1940's (Benson 1948, 1953, Dunning 1935, Sherwin 1936, 1939a and b,) and more recent remains being uncovered during development impacts (RPS consultants 2001, pp1-12, Network Archaeology 2005, p38-40 and Loader and Westmore 1995). Extensive areas of cropmark sites recorded from systematic aerial photograph survey indicate possible settlement of Late Bronze Age to Iron Age, but have not been dated other than stylistically. One coastal occupation site at Redcliffe revealed Iron Age occupation continuing into the Roman period with possible salt working and Vectis ware pottery manufacture (Poole 1936 and Tomalin 1990).

### The built environment

There is little evidence for Late Bronze Age to Iron Age buildings with a only a general Bronze Age date assigned to a hut site cut through during construction of road at Gore Down (Dunning 1932), and a Late Iron age date being given to two "hut" sites excavated at Sudmoor in the 1930's (Dunning 1935).

Until recent excavations Iron Age settlement on the Island was defined as comprising "hut sites" (Benson 1948 and 1953, Sherwin 1939a and b) but excavation of roundhouses below and to the south of the possible hillfort at Yaverland hints at a pattern of Later Iron age settlement which relates to that in Southern Central England (unpublished SMR 3553).

The recent survey work in the Wootton Quarr intertidal zone has shown that the Bronze Age and Iron Age communities in these areas had a mixed economy which utilised, and consequently developed their built environment within the land, coastal and marine zones. The dated wooden structures recorded in the coastal zone must be taken into account within the built environment discussion (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

Two timber structures dated to the Later Bronze Age by Radiocarbon Dating remind archaeologists of the fundamental concepts of a built environment consisting of timber and earth structures and, more importantly, of the seamless use of all ecozones, especially the coastal areas and for both the Littoral and sublittoral zones in these periods. The dated structures are a longshore post alignment at Fishbourne Beach dated to 780 to 390 cal BC and a long parallel sided enclosure of ash posts on Quarr Beach dated to 840 to 530 cal BC (Tomalin et al forthcoming).

Five more of these timber structures have also been radiocarbon dated to the Iron Age, showing the continuation of a timber built environment extending into coastal ecozones in the Early to Mid Iron Age at least. Two timbers from a longshore timber alignment on Binstead Beach have been dated to 400-200 cal BC and 840-530 cal BC (SMR 5332). A further group of associated features on Binstead beach consisting of one long rectangular and two other rectangular post settings have also been dated to the Iron Age. The long rectangular post setting (SMR 5582) has had two dates – an oak timber dating to 770 to 390 cal BC and an ash timber dating to 840 to 530 cal BC. A timber from one of the rectangular post settings (SMR 5583) was dated to 810 to 400 cal BC, with the other dated to slightly later in the Iron Age at 400 to 190 cal BC. A substantial littoral zone timber structure on Fishbourne Beach has also been dated to the Iron Age and seems to show the continued use and possibly replacement of these structures later in the period and the subsequent early Roman period (SMR 5598). This structure consists of 80 posts following mean low water mark, with three of the oak timbers radiocarbon dated to 840-600 cal BC, 800-400 cal BC and 780-390 cal BC. This is accompanied by a second line of posts with two oaks radiocarbon dated to 110calBC to calAD120 and 110calBC to cal AD130. Unfortunately further archaeological research is required to shed light upon the function of these structures.

#### Ceremony, ritual and religion.

With the legacy of earlier Bronze Age cemeteries of burial mounds concentrated on chalk ridges, the known Later Bronze Age urnfield sites show a different distribution with only Rew Down (SMR 667) situated on the Middle to Upper Chalk.

It is important to note that all of these Late Bronze Age cemetery sites are known from documentary evidence recorded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and that both a re-assessment of this data and field survey to identify unknown sites are long overdue. Forty urns are recorded in the 1890's at Afton LBA urnfield (Sherwin 1940) and eleven burials contained within globular, barrel and bucket urns covering a circular area of 12 to 15 feet in diameter were revealed by coastal erosion and excavated between 1928 and 1930 at Barns High (Dunning 1931). Seventy one other LBA urns are reported to have been unearthed and destroyed at Swanmore around 1865 (Dunning 1931) and a single urn burial is recorded as having been recovered from the cliffs at Chale in 1856 (Hillier 1856). Other possible urn cemeteries are suggested to have been at Yafford (Wilkins 1859), Rew Down (unpublished SMR 667) and Whitwell (Kell 1867).

Known Iron Age burials consist of both inhumations and cremations and until recently have all been focussed around the Undercliff. Inhumations include a double crouched female and child burial (Dunning 1951), three crouched burials known from documentary sources only (unpublished SMR records 700, 729 and 737) and a flexed inhumation found with corroded remains of a sword and shield (Stead 1969). A reported Iron Age cremation cemetery was recorded from records of several cremations and urns and a burnt "pyre" area found near Lake in 1931 (Poole 1932) and documentary records of another Undercliff site yielding both inhumation and cremation burials dated to the Iron Age must be reassessed (SMR 1593).

Recent excavations of the triple ditch system of a possible Iron Age hillfort at Yaverland revealed a crouched inhumation burial within the top layers of one of the infilled ditch fills. However the report is still awaited from the archaeological contractor for this site and further details are unavailable (unpublished SMR record 3353).

#### Warfare, defences and military installations.

There is no evidence for these recorded for the Late Bronze Age in the Isle of Wight SMR at present.

Excavations at Yaverland in 2001 revealed a triple ditched defensive system surrounding a large area on the hilltop overlooking Brading Haven, a possible Roman and Iron Age harbour (unpublished SMR record 3553). Roundhouses, a collapsed wall and large quantities of Vectis ware and domestic waste were recovered from the floor of the hillside lying underneath the hillfort. The only other potential hillfort site is the supposed unfinished promontory fort at Chillerton Down lying partially across the narrow point of along steep sided spur on chalk hills. A 275 foot long rampart of a height of 10 feet and about 60-70 feet in width in the form of five mounds in a line and a ditch cross the summit of the ridge (Dunning 1947).

#### Material culture

A re-assessment of the later Bronze Age metalwork would be appropriate as the majority of the individual finds including a Taunton Phase palstave (unpublished SMR record 2130) and the Werrar hoard (Dunning 1936) of a slender form of palstaves, thought to be indicative of an Isle of Wight style were identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The operation of the Portable Antiquities Scheme on the Island from 2003 has allowed a new collection of information to be gathered in relation to late bronze age metalwork. Individual finds include a "Hogsback knife" (unpublished SMR record 5969) a late Bronze Age triangular knife of Carps Tongue Complex tradition which is typical of imported French metalwork arriving in Southern Britain during or after the 9th century BC. Additional information has become available to supplement our knowledge of metalwork hoards during this period with the Kirkton hoard which includes socketed axes, gouges, knives and a socketed hammer (unpublished SMR record 4974). A further 11 metalwork pieces including spearheads, axes, a razor, palstave and gauge have recently been recorded under the Portable Antiquities Scheme and further analysis of the Isle of Wight assemblage including these is required.

Peter Northover has carried out metallurgical analysis of most of the bronze objects (Northover 2001) and has also undertaken analysis of the Kirkton hoard (unpublished SMR report).which includes a date of manufacture at  $\pm 50$  BP.

Tantalising glimpses of social, economic, maritime trade and other linkages are revealed by the Iron Age coinage recorded on the SMR with the full chronological range of currency activity represented. This includes the early type "B" currency bars (Antiquity 14, 432 and PSA 8), pre Gallic war British coinage such as the rare British C: Yarmouth types (SMR 90), coinage from during and immediately after the Gallic War of 60-55BC such as Gallo-Belgic type E and British QB (SMR 209) types, as well as later Durotrigian and Verrikan staters. This Island wide picture includes smelting evidence of silver bars, silver and gold smelts including a Gallo-Belgian stater and Durotrigian staters and an American silver stater of the Baiocasses (SMR 2552) as well as a fragment of gold ingot with a metal content resembling the earliest types of Gallo-Belgic gold staters, specifically types A and B (SMR 2390). A re-assessment of the Iron Age coins is needed to provide more information on the assemblage in

the light of the metal detected evidence. The Island also has ceramic evidence of trade and communications with amphorae from numerous sites, the Wootton Quarr project revealing Glastonbury ware, 'Vesicular' ware thought to have been manufactured at or near Hengistbury Head, pottery of St Catherine's Hill/Worthy Down tradition and Gallo-Belgic finewares, amongst many others.

### Crafts, trade and industry

A re-assessment of available evidence needs to be carried out.

### Transport and communication

The strategic role of the Isle of Wight in international and National transport and communication must have been enormous. Ideally placed to play a role in both the Atlantic and Central European trade routes, as well as its links within England mean that a re-assessment of all the available evidence for these themes in the Bronze and Iron Age are long overdue.

### Legacy

The Isle of Wight's place in Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Britain has yet to be defined and the new evidence recorded since the first systematic survey of the Island's archaeology (Basford 1980) must be re-assessed in order to understand the legacy it left for the arrival of the Romans.

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