

## **MILESTONES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LUNDY**

by

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper provides a brief résumé of what is known about the chronology of settlement on Lundy from studies of flint work and ceramics from the end of the last Ice Age until the Early Medieval period.

Keywords: *Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman, pottery, lithics*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last sixty years there have been major advances in archaeological techniques and theoretical approaches as well as an exponential increase in the amount of data available world wide. In the same period there has been a range of programmes of archaeological research on Lundy, all sponsored in various ways by the Lundy Field Society, and which reflect these advances. This paper attempts a brief statement on what is reliably known about archaeological chronology on Lundy from the end of the last Ice Age until the Early Medieval period. The 'Milestones' of the title refer to established points in this chronology. There are as yet no radiocarbon determinations from archaeological sites on the island and chronology is applied by analogy from that established across south west Britain.

### **MESOLITHIC AND NEOLITHIC**

Evidence for these periods is restricted to collections of worked flints made over the years, some as organised programmes of field walking and test pit excavation (e.g. Schofield & Webster, 1989; 1990; 1991), others as the recording of chance finds. These lithic finds are currently being studied by Ann and Martin Plummer for the National Trust and their results referenced below as A. & M. Plummer. Almost all the flint used appears to be sourced from beaches in North Devon, probably from Lundy itself. So far no material characteristic of the Early Mesolithic has been found, from the ninth to the mid-eighth millennia B.C.: in general across south west Britain Early Mesolithic flints are few compared to those of the Later Mesolithic (Roberts, 1999). However two pieces may indicate activity during the Late Palaeolithic or the Palaeolithic/Mesolithic transition. The Later Mesolithic is of much longer duration than the Early Mesolithic, from the mid-eighth to the late fifth millennia B.C., and produces much more material and some distinctive microlithic forms. Over most of Lundy, flints tend to be found in broad scatters and not, so far, the tight concentrations which may indicate the positions of house sites. Current

studies (A. & M. Plummer) indicate activity in the southern and northern areas of the Island with less evidence in the central area between the Quarter Wall and Threequarter Wall. There was extensive use of the Tillage and Brick Field areas (Schofield, 1992; 1994). The hunter-gather lifestyle of Mesolithic communities involved considerable mobility and Lundy is likely to have been visited on a seasonal basis.

The techniques used to work flint change a little in the Neolithic and this, as well as the introduction of new artifact types, notably single piece arrowheads in place of composite microlithic points, makes it possible to distinguish Neolithic flint artifacts from those of the preceding period. A few pieces of nodular flint, from non-beach sources in Devon, should belong to this period (A. & M. Plummer). The Neolithic covers the fourth and third millennia B.C. A sparse scattering of Neolithic flint across Lundy has been recognized, including a few Early Neolithic leaf arrowheads from the Brick Field and North End, and also a Late Neolithic transverse arrowhead from North End (A. & M. Plummer). None of the distinctive Neolithic ground stone axes has yet been found on the Island; however a fragment of a polished flint axe has been found at North End. There is no pottery apart from two possible sherds from a surface collection at SS13254789 on the North End, found together with a leaf arrowhead (Quinnell, in preparation). Current thinking (Thomas, 1999) sees a substantive element of gathering and mobility in the lifestyle of Neolithic communities and it is reasonable to see the Lundy finds as evidence of some continuity in seasonal resource exploitation from the Mesolithic.

### **EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGES**

From late in the 3rd millennium B.C., and loosely associated with the introduction of Beaker pottery, round barrows and cairns began to be constructed across south west Britain, most in the first half of the second millennium B.C., the Early Bronze Age, but a few on Exmoor in the second half of this millennium, the Middle Bronze Age (Quinnell, 1997, 34-5). At least fifteen of these sites are recorded in the National Trust Sites and Monuments Record but none have been investigated (but see below Middle Park I). By the Middle Bronze Age evidence of settled farming is found across south west Britain, leaving traces of fields, enclosures and hut circles or platforms marking the landscape. On Lundy systematic field survey by the National Trust 1989-99 has provided a record of all archaeological sites marking its surface, from Early Bronze Age cairns and barrows, through the complexities of settled farming from the Middle Bronze Age onwards to the fields, settlements and industrial activities of Medieval and later period (Thackray, 1999: Blaylock, this volume).

A number of hut circles were excavated by K.S. Gardner in the 1960s (Gardner, 1965; 1967; 1969) but have remained unpublished. Recent work by the author (Quinnell, in preparation) has enabled the ceramics from these excavations to be identified and provided with a broad chronology. The earliest of this material is the group of Biconical domestic ware from North End Hut Circle 6 (Gardner, 1969): other Biconical sherds come from other excavated North End hut circles, as surface finds close to Widow's Tenement and from Test Pit 235 dug by Schofield and

Webster (1991) south of Quarter Wall. This Biconical domestic ware belongs to the Middle Bronze Age with a good comparable assemblage at Brean Down (Woodward, 1990). While some problems about the components of the pottery remain to be resolved by detailed petrological work, both this Biconical domestic ware and the subsequent prehistoric ceramics referred to below appear to have been manufactured on Lundy.

Flint continued to provide a range of tools of types distinctive to the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Schofield (1992, 71-6) has highlighted a range of this material found across the North End and made accessible by extensive surface burning in 1933 and 1935. The current work by A. & M. Plummer also highlights activity across the North End.

### **LATE BRONZE AND IRON AGES**

Several excavated hut circles have produced Late Bronze Age Plain Ware, a simple ceramic style dating from the eleventh to the ninth centuries B.C.: again a good comparable assemblage with associated radiocarbon dates comes from Brean Down (Woodward, 1990). The hut circles which produced this are those excavated on Beacon Hill by Gardner in 1966 (Gardner, 1967), the nearby hut circle which underlies the Beacon Hill cemetery (Thomas, 1992), hut circles at Middle Park I (Gardner, 1965) and II (Gardner, 1967), and one at the North End. (The character of the site at Middle Park I is unclear: it may possibly be a cairn with subsequent use as a domestic site). This Plain Ware represents the most widespread prehistoric activity so far identified through excavation on Lundy. Both of the Beacon Hill hut circles contain fragments of briquetage in a locally sourced fabric indicating salt production on the Island at this date. Some simple flintwork was still in use in this period.

To date no pottery has been reliably identified as belonging to the Early Iron Age. (It should be noted that the Biconical and Plain Ware groups were initially assigned to the Early Iron Age (Gardner, 1965; 1967; 1969; 1972) as, at the time of their excavation, the detailed prehistoric ceramic sequence in south west Britain was not well understood). In general across Devon and Cornwall little pottery was in use at this period, broadly the eighth to fourth centuries B.C. (e.g. Quinnell, 1999). The Middle Iron Age, from the third to the first centuries B.C. is represented by South Western Decorated Ware (Glastonbury Ware) of which a single sherd came from a North End hut circle.

### **THE ROMAN PERIOD**

Charles Thomas's excavations in 1969 below the Beacon Hill cemetery demonstrated that beneath this, and partly re-using a hut circle with Late Bronze Age Plain Ware, was a circular house or hut circle occupied in the later Roman centuries. The pottery consisted of black-burnished ware from the Poole Harbour area of Dorset, South Devon Ware, probably made in the Dart Valley, and Exeter Gritty Grey Ware, produced somewhere in the Exeter area (Quinnell, 2006), and is likely to range in date from the later second century until the fourth century A.D. *Pace* Thomas

(1992, 45) there are no ceramics made locally, apart from some briquetage indicating salt production, a situation similar to much of Exmoor where pottery was imported from the south coast of Devon and Dorset (pers. comm. L. Bray). The only other distinctive find was a rotary quern. Elsewhere a single sherd of black-burnished ware was recorded from Test Pit 12 just south of Quarter Wall (Schofield & Webster, 1989, 36) and Gardner (1961a) records two grey ware rim sherds without other provenance in Bristol City Museum.

### **THE POST-ROMAN CENTURIES**

The principal evidence is the Beacon Hill cemetery with its four inscribed Christian memorial stones. Thomas (1992, 43) suggests that OPTIMI and RESTEUTA are likely to date to around A.D. 500 on epigraphic style, that POTITI falls in the later sixth century and the fourth, ... IGERNI (FILI) TIGERNI, to the first half of the seventh century. Thomas's excavations demonstrated a complex series of long cist grave burials within an enclosure which he interpreted as belonging to a monastic settlement. No domestic structures associated with the suggested monastery or any others of contemporary date have yet been found. By this stage no pottery was being manufactured in Devon but a very small amount was imported from the Mediterranean. Two imported sherds have recently been identified from Pigs Paradise, effectively unstratified: one is from a Late Roman 1 amphora (British Bii), the other from a buff-coloured amphora (McBride, 2005): the most likely date for these imports is late fifth to early sixth centuries A.D. A third imported sherd, a surface find at SS138444 (Gardner, 1961b: Langham & Langham, 1970, 140) is grouped by Thomas (1981, 25) as a minor unidentified ware. The virtual absence of ceramics in North Devon continues until the occurrence of chert-tempered wares in the eleventh and twelfth centuries but none of these has been found on Lundy so far.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is not suggested that the datable artefacts so far available for study represent the full sequence of past activity on Lundy. It is unlikely that the Island was unoccupied during much of the Iron Age or the early Roman centuries. The framework presented above is only the start of understanding and most of this is based on data which is not yet fully analysed and published. Full publication is the next step in the understanding of this period of Lundy's archaeology. There has been no excavation to modern standards supported by the full repertoire of methods now available for investigating environmental, chronometric and ecofactual data. In time, when adequate resources can be made available, a programme investigating a cairn or barrow and a series of hut circle sites and their related enclosures and field systems will form an invaluable second step to advancing understanding of the settlement sequence on the Island.

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