# The Neolithic in Jersey

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with a contribution on pottery by Hélenè Pioffet

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# Preface

The archaeology of islands is concentrated, and Jersey is no exception. A rich variety of archaeological remains survive above and below ground in Jersey, along its shoreline, and within its waters.

As a British Crown Dependency outside the United Kingdom and European Union the Island is beyond the reach of national heritage management frameworks and funding but strives to comply with international best practice. In 2022 the Island's first Heritage Strategy charted a course to develop the infrastructure in which archaeology is managed, including legislation, funding, the development of an historic environment record and expert posts to support it as well as an historic environment Research Framework.

Commissioned by Jersey Heritage and led by Dr Peter Chowne, the Research Framework has been a partnership project involving local experts and international scholars undertaken over several years in seminars, discussions and consultation to produce a shared view of the current state of knowledge and the questions which can be asked of our archaeological resource. It comes at a time of growing pressure on those resources through development but also of new opportunities to improve management of this significant but vulnerable aspect of our heritage and identity.

I am delighted to be able to thank Peter, the Advisory Board and Resource Assessment authors and to welcome the publication of the Framework, as a series of volumes, which will be of use to planners, contractors, Jersey Heritage staff, researchers, local groups and a growing number of university partnerships. For all of us it will be a platform for further research, greater understanding, valuing, conservation and enjoyment of our historic environment.

Jonathan Carter

Chief Executive

Jersey Heritage

# Chapter 1.
# General introduction and overview

Despite their island setting and the fact that they are self-governing British Crown Dependencies, in terms of Neolithic archaeology the Channel Islands are to be understood within the context of developments in Normandy and Brittany, rather than those in Britain. In common with the Cotentin peninsula (Manche, Normandy) and with Brittany – but slightly later than in those areas – the islands appear to have undergone colonisation by Neolithic farming groups between 5000 BC and 4800 BC (although for a different view on the Neolithisation process, see Bukach 2004 and Garrow and Sturt 2017a). In our opinion they were undoubtedly colonised from adjacent parts of the French mainland – Lower Normandy and northern Brittany – and the immigrant farmers will have come by sea, since Jersey will effectively have become an island by then, as discussed below. Indeed, the process of sea level rise continued thereafter, as is clear from finds of Neolithic flint artefacts and pottery, cattle bones and tree stumps from submerged woodland preserved in peat deposits in St Ouen's Bay, Jersey; from tree stumps, peat and Neolithic artefacts at Vazon Bay in Guernsey; and from Neolithic artefacts and peat at Longis Bay in Alderney (Conneller *et al.* 2016, with original references therein).

In terms of the potential number of Neolithic sites in the Channel Islands, it would appear that the two large islands, Jersey and Guernsey, are roughly equal. The Neolithic archaeology of Guernsey is somewhat better known than that of Jersey, thanks partly to the activities of the 19th century antiquary and collector Frederick Corbin Lukis (Sebire 2008), and partly to the excavation of the Early Neolithic funerary monument at Les Fouaillages on Guernsey by Ian Kinnes of the British Museum (Kinnes 1982; 1986). However, the recent excavation at Simon Sand Quarry on Jersey by Lesley McFadyen (McFadyen *et al.* 2017), the synthesis of available evidence regarding the Early Neolithic in Jersey and across the Channel Islands by Duncan Garrow and Fraser Sturt (2017), and the significant investment represented by the Research Framework for the Historic Environment of Jersey Project, are helping to redress the imbalance in the state of knowledge in these two islands. Moreover, the work carried out on various aspects of Neolithic Jersey by Mark Patton from the 1980s to the Noughties (e.g. Patton 1990; 1991; 1992; 1995a; 2001; Patton and Finlaison 2001; Patton *et al.* 1999) has contributed significantly to our current understanding of this period in Jersey's prehistory. Targeted research programmes will be needed to address the research questions identified below, however, since in the absence of large infrastructural projects, developer-funded archaeology in Jersey on its own is unlikely to provide much more than a series of 'snapshots' of Neolithic activities.

In our opinion, the 'big picture' for Neolithic Jersey (and indeed the other Channel Islands more generally) can be summarised as follows – and note that we are using the periodisation as employed for adjacent parts of France, so that what we describe below as 'Middle Neolithic I is part of what Patton had referred to as the 'Early Neolithic':

**Early Neolithic (*c.* 4900–4700 BC)**: Arrival – to a sparsely-populated archipelago – of small groups of farmers with ancestry in the Danubian Neolithic tradition, from adjacent parts of Normandy and Brittany. Cultural attribution: Blicquy-Villeneuve-Saint-Germain (mostly its BVSG "cordons" facies, but with a BVSG "classic" element). Maintenance of contacts with these areas following their arrival (as shown, for example, in the importation of Cinglais flint from the Plain of Caen). The use of stone disc-rings (which we know, from examples elsewhere, would have been worn on the upper arm of some women: Pétrequin *et al.* 2019: figure 11) suggests a degree of social differentiation among these colonising agro-pastoralists.

**Middle Neolithic (*c.* 4700–3400 BC)**: Continuing contacts with adjacent parts of the mainland (and, from *c.* 4600 BC, from further afield in Brittany), but also emergence of a distinctive Channel Islands cultural identity from *c.* 4600 BC. The Middle Neolithic can be periodised as follows:

- **Middle Neolithic I** (early): *c.* 4700–4600 BC, Continuing interaction with farming communities on the adjacent mainland demonstrated by adoption of the Early Cerny style of pottery (e.g. at the settlement at Mont Orgueil), which was in use across Normandy and most of Brittany, and by acquisition of precious artefacts of Alpine jadeitite and serpentinite and (either at this time or a century or so later) of amphibolite from the Jizera Mountains of central Europe.
- **Middle Neolithic I** (late): *c.* 4600–4300 BC: Continuing interaction with groups on the mainland, but also emergence of distinctive Channel Islands cultural identity – the so-called 'Pinacle-Fouaillages' group – as elements in ceramic design from mainland France were adopted and adapted. Contact with Normandy (and, probably indirectly, with the Loire) is attested in various ways, including by the presence of pottery with Chambon-style characteristics at Le Pinacle and at Les Fouaillages in Guernsey. Contact with Brittany is attested by the adoption and adaptation of elements of the Early Castellic ceramic style of the Morbihan area of Brittany. Production of axeheads (plus shoe-last adzeheads and perforated pick-hammers, the last probably used as quarrying tools) at Le Pinacle, and circulation of these axeheads around the Channel Islands.
- **Middle Neolithic II** (early): *c.* 4300–3900 BC: 'golden age' of construction of megalithic (and partly drystone-built) funerary monuments, not just on Jersey but across the Channel Islands, with the passage tomb at La Hougue Bie being by far the largest; identity and power relations seem to have been expressed through the medium of these funerary monuments. Continuing interaction with Normandy and Brittany, including the Morbihan, is shown in various ways including the importation of axeheads of dolerite from the Plussulien quarry in central Armorica from *c.* 4000 BC, and of flint axeheads from Norman flint mines, probably at the same time.
- **Middle Neolithic II** (late): *c.* 3900–3400 BC: a poorly represented and poorly understood period of Jersey prehistory, and indeed that of the Channel Islands as a whole. Presumably continued importation of Plussulien metadolerite axeheads and those of Norman flint; importation of at least one late-style axehead of Alpine rock.

**Late and Final Neolithic (*c.* 3400–2300 BC)**: another poorly represented period – particularly between *c.* 3400 and 2900 BC – although a few settlements are known and it is clear that the inhabitants of Jersey and the other Channel Islands were in contact with mainland France, as attested, for example, by the presence of axehead-pendants of Alpine jadeitite (arriving probably during the last quarter of the 4th millennium) and of early third millennium daggers made from Grand-Pressigny flint. This period can be divided as follows:

- **Late Neolithic** (*c.* 3400–2800 BC): construction of gallery graves at Le Couperon, Ville-ès-Nouaux and (on Alderney) Les Pourciaux North; use of 'Seine-Oise-Marne'-style pottery; use of axehead-pendants, and probably also of axeheads of metadolerite from Plussulien; possibly erection of menhirs, including two on Guernsey shaped into stylised female figures. Hints, from aDNA analysis of human remains from secondary use of Le Dèhus passage tomb on Guernsey, of the arrival of new settlers from the French mainland.
- **Final Neolithic (and Chalcolithic)** (*c.* 2800–2300 BC): acts of closure at passage tombs and gallery graves; construction of some megalithic cists, chambers and cists-in-circles; use of imported Grand-Pressigny flint; ceremonial use of Le Pinacle; use of flat-based undecorated pottery of 'Gord' type, then appearance of Beaker pottery, 'Jersey Bowls', and metal artefacts. Probable use of 'Guernsey pick-axeheads' at this time.

Overall, our understanding of the Neolithic period in Jersey is highly uneven, with considerable gaps in our knowledge about settlement patterns, land use and the changing environment; about the nature of social organisation; about the chronological position of certain monument and artefact types; and about social developments in general during the fourth and third millennia. In the Channel Islands more generally, Neolithic settlement sites – of whatever phase of the Neolithic – are under-represented. Often, the evidence is found during excavations of sites of other periods, as on the island of Herm, or at L'Erée (Camp Varouf) in Guernsey (Cunliffe and Jersey 2000; cf. Garrow and Sturt 2017b for subsequent targeted excavation) and at L'Ouziere in Jersey (Patton and Finlaison 2001), or else it was discovered long ago, in disturbed contexts, such as at La Motte (Sinel 1913), Le Pinacle (Godfray and Burdo 1949, 1950; Patton 2001) and Grosnez Hougue (Rybot 1924) in Jersey. Moreover, while the evidential record tends to be dominated by the megalithic monuments that are the most visible features of the Neolithic landscape, these monuments have suffered from antiquarian and other interventions (Aubin 2018) – including, in the case of the Mont de la Ville passage tomb, being dismantled, shipped out from the island and re-erected in the grounds of the retired Governor's house in Henley-on-Thames (Hawkes 1937; Read 1985)! The amount of information that we can obtain from Jersey's chamber tombs is therefore limited, although there is scope for extracting more information from the surviving finds.

The Resource Assessment presented here aims to set developments in Jersey within their broader Channel Islands and north-west French context, and to frame research questions accordingly. It is for this reason that frequent reference is made to sites in Guernsey.

All calibrated dates in this contribution are cited at 95.4% probability, rounded out, and have been calibrated using OxCal v4.4.4.