



PIONEERS, SETTLERS, VILLAGERS, AND WARRIORS: EXCAVATIONS AT RONALDSWAY AIRPORT, ISLE OF MAN

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Front cover: *The excavation of a later Bronze Age settlement at Taxiway Alpha East*
Rear Cover: *The landscape surrounding Ronaldsway Farm, as depicted on historic mapping (top); excavating a Mesolithic house at Cass ny Hawin II (middle); an Iron Age inhumation burial at Taxiway Alpha East (bottom)*

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Abbreviations

aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
CMS	Centre for Manx Studies
DEH	Dental enamel hypoplasia
dGPS	Differential geographical positioning system
EMC	Estimated minimum count
EVEs	Estimated vessel equivalents
FAULU	Field Archaeology Unit of Liverpool University
GIS	Geographical information system
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
LUAU	Lancaster University Archaeological Unit
MGC	Museum and Galleries Commission
MNE	Minimum number of elements
MNI	Minimum number of individuals
MNH	Manx National Heritage
NISP	Number of identified specimens
OA	Oxford Archaeology
ORAU	Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit
OS	Ordnance Survey
QGIS	Quantum GIS
RESA	Runway End Safety Area
SEM	Scanning electron microscopy
ScARF	Scottish Archaeological Research Framework
SUERC	Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre

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Summary

A major programme of archaeological excavation was undertaken at Ronaldsway Airport, in the south of the Isle of Man, close to Derbyhaven Bay (SC 2835 6819), throughout 2008 and 2009. The excavations formed part of a programme of runway and taxiway extension, and other airport improvements (together forming the Runway End Safety Areas (RESA) Project), and were conducted by Oxford Archaeology, on behalf of the Isle of Man Airport Division (part of the Isle of Man Government Department of Transport).

The work proved highly successful in recording an outstanding, and highly significant, collection of prehistoric remains. These comprised a Mesolithic 'pit-house' (Cass ny Hawin II), dating to the later ninth millennium cal BC, which is currently the earliest house on Man. The locale had also seen some earlier Mesolithic activity, probably by some of the first human colonisers on the island. The house produced a large assemblage of narrow-blade lithics (21,610 items), coarse-stone tools (60), and palaeoenvironmental remains, and detailed analysis of these has produced a unique 'snapshot' into Mesolithic domestic life. Other Mesolithic remains were encountered in the vicinity, including a pit group (Cass ny Hawin III), dating to the mid-eighth millennium cal BC, along with several Mesolithic lithic scatters. A Neolithic rectangular timber 'house' was another significant find, as well as stray finds dating to this period. The structure has been radiocarbon dated to the last centuries of the fourth millennium cal BC and provides interesting parallels with the 'Ronaldsway House', excavated at the airport in the 1940s.

Important Bronze Age remains were uncovered during the construction of one of the new taxiways. These comprised a timber structure, probably domestic, dating to the late third/early second millennium cal BC, and extensive later Bronze Age remains that were seemingly elements of a large, village-sized settlement extending across a large swathe of the airport. In the taxiway area, five contemporary roundhouses, two other timber structures, and a large midden were in use c 1250-950 cal BC. The roundhouses comprised domestic structures, along with a specialised 'kitchen', where food was prepared. In addition, one of the roundhouses and one of the timber structures functioned as 'workshops', associated with the casting of copper-alloy tools and weapons, and lead objects, indicating that such activities were deeply embedded within a largely domestic settlement.

Significantly, the eventual abandonment of the roundhouses was undertaken in a structured and systematic way, which involved burning and/or backfilling them, followed by the construction of stone cairns, in acts of commemoration. At a slightly later date, following this initial episode of abandonment, another small roundhouse was constructed in the area, in c 1000-800 cal BC, which was later covered by a small cairn as part of a similar process of abandonment and commemoration.

The RESA project also produced good evidence for Iron Age activity, including unenclosed roundhouses, which are common features of Iron Age settlement in the Irish Sea area, together with much rarer burials. These had been placed within the abandoned later Bronze Age settlement, and included an earlier Iron Age double-burial, of an adult female and child, which may have been contemporary with a small midden, suggesting that feasting was part of the burial rite. Another burial, dating to the end of the first millennium cal BC, or perhaps to the start of the first millennium cal AD, contained an adult male 'warrior', who had clearly been wounded by a sword blow, presumably during an act of interpersonal violence.

In addition to prehistoric remains, the project also uncovered piecemeal evidence for the more recent use of the landscape. This comprised an enclosure and boundaries, relating to later medieval and post-medieval agricultural activity. The evidence has also enabled the medieval remains excavated in the 1930s to be reconsidered. This suggests that an important high-status Viking-age enclosure was present at the airport, established on the site of an early Christian cemetery containing lintel graves and a shrine, which was used later in the medieval period as a battle cemetery, and then as an iron bloomery, perhaps operated by Furness Abbey.

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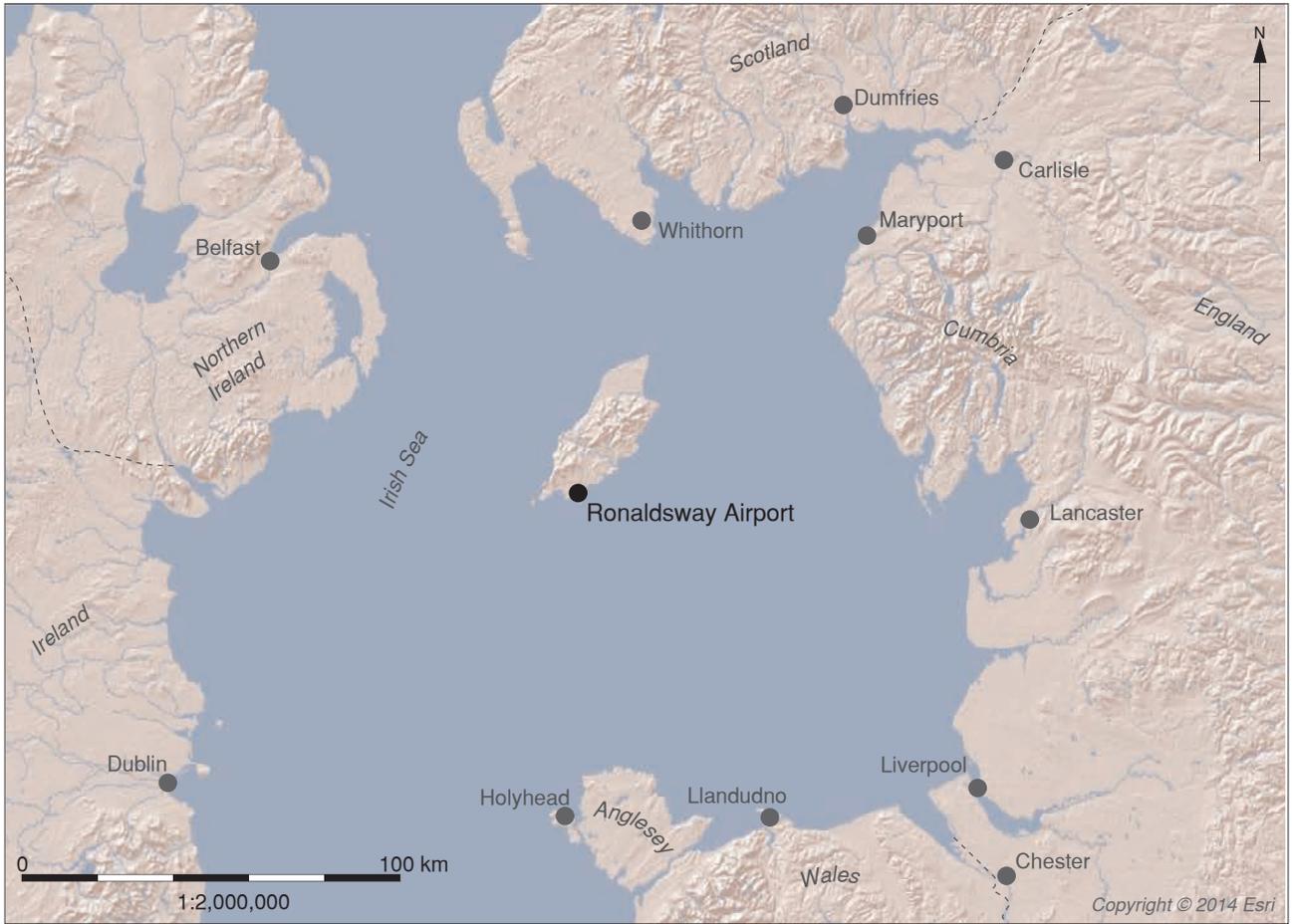


Figure 1: The Isle of Man and its position in the Irish Sea