

ISLES OF THE DEAD?

THE SETTING AND FUNCTION
OF THE BRONZE AGE CHAMBERED
CAIRNS AND CISTS
OF THE ISLES OF SCILLY

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Summary

The number and density of megalithic chambered cairns in the Isles of Scilly, a small archipelago 45km from Land's End, Cornwall, has been remarked upon since the 18th century. It has been suggested that they were the burial places of people from elsewhere, whose remains were brought to the islands. This has led to Scilly being described as the 'Isles of the Dead'. Other interpretations are that they were shrines to ensure soil fertility or that they were navigational markers.

This study examines the evidence about these structures, generally known as entrance graves, and the associated cist graves, as well as the human remains and artefacts found in them. The research seeks to understand how the entrance graves were used, their dating, their positioning in the islands and any links with megalithic burial chambers in other parts of the British Isles and Brittany.

The findings indicate that the entrance graves were indeed used for burial and that a wide range of grave goods, including prestige items such as faience, glass and pumice, were placed in them. The pottery, in particular, shows the development of a specific island identity. The use of GIS-based mapping to study the setting of the sites confirms the selection of hilltop and upper hillslope locations in the majority of cases.

The dating of these sites, including the first radiocarbon determinations from them, shows a period of use between c2000 and 1250 cal BC, with the cists slightly pre-dating the entrance graves. This coincides with the inundation of a significant area of the islands and suggests that the construction of large numbers of entrance graves may have been a response to this loss of land and a way of 'holding the line' against the depredations of the sea.

The comparison of the Scillonian entrance graves with sites in west Cornwall, south-east Ireland, south-west Scotland, the Channel Islands and Brittany, which have been held to be related, indicates that only in Cornwall are there any real similarities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Isles of Scilly

The Isles of Scilly form a tiny archipelago comprising more than 200 islands and rocks and lying some 45km west-south-west of Land's End, Cornwall; the islands form the most south-westerly part of the British Isles. The location of the islands is shown in figure 1.1 and their layout in figure 1.2.

Geologically, the islands are a granite pluton, one of a chain which includes Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor and the Land's End peninsula, but differing from the others in having little in the way of metallic minerals; the Scilly granite is approximately 290 million years old (Scourse 2006b). The total landmass of the islands is now about 15km² but, over the past 10,000 years, sea levels have risen more than 30m,

inundating large areas of low-lying ground and dividing what was once a single main landmass of more than 90 km² into the present-day cluster of islands (Charman et al. 2012a).

Although Scilly is geographically close to Cornwall, there are significant cultural differences between the two. Because of the small size of the islands and because of their position at the western entrance to the English Channel, as shown in figure 1.1, they have experienced considerable population change, many migrants to the islands coming from much further away than Cornwall.

From the mid 16th to the early 20th centuries the construction of several phases of defensive works in Scilly led to the arrival of significant numbers of soldiers and

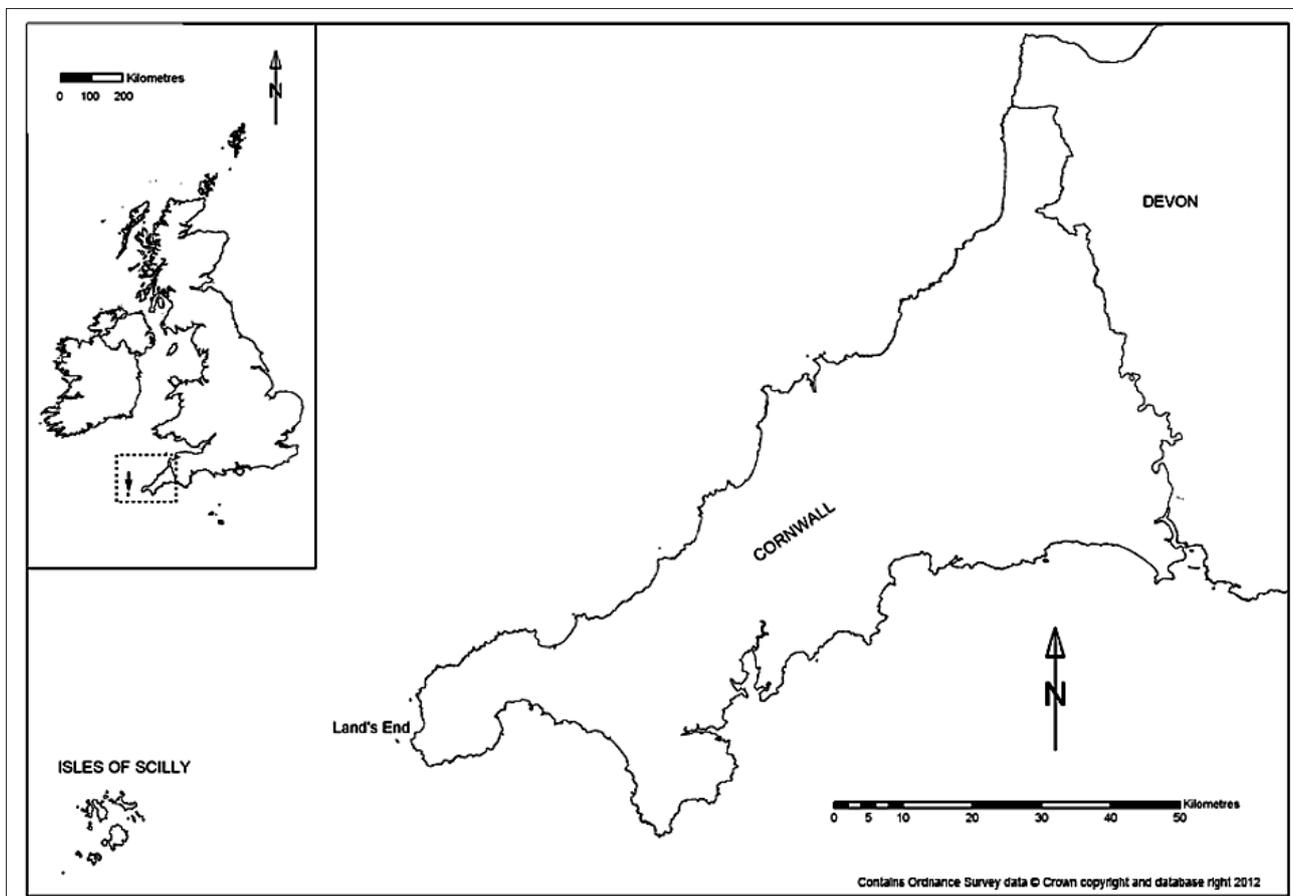


FIGURE 1.1 LOCATION MAP OF THE ISLES OF SCILLY, FROM JOHNS (2012:FIG 2.1)

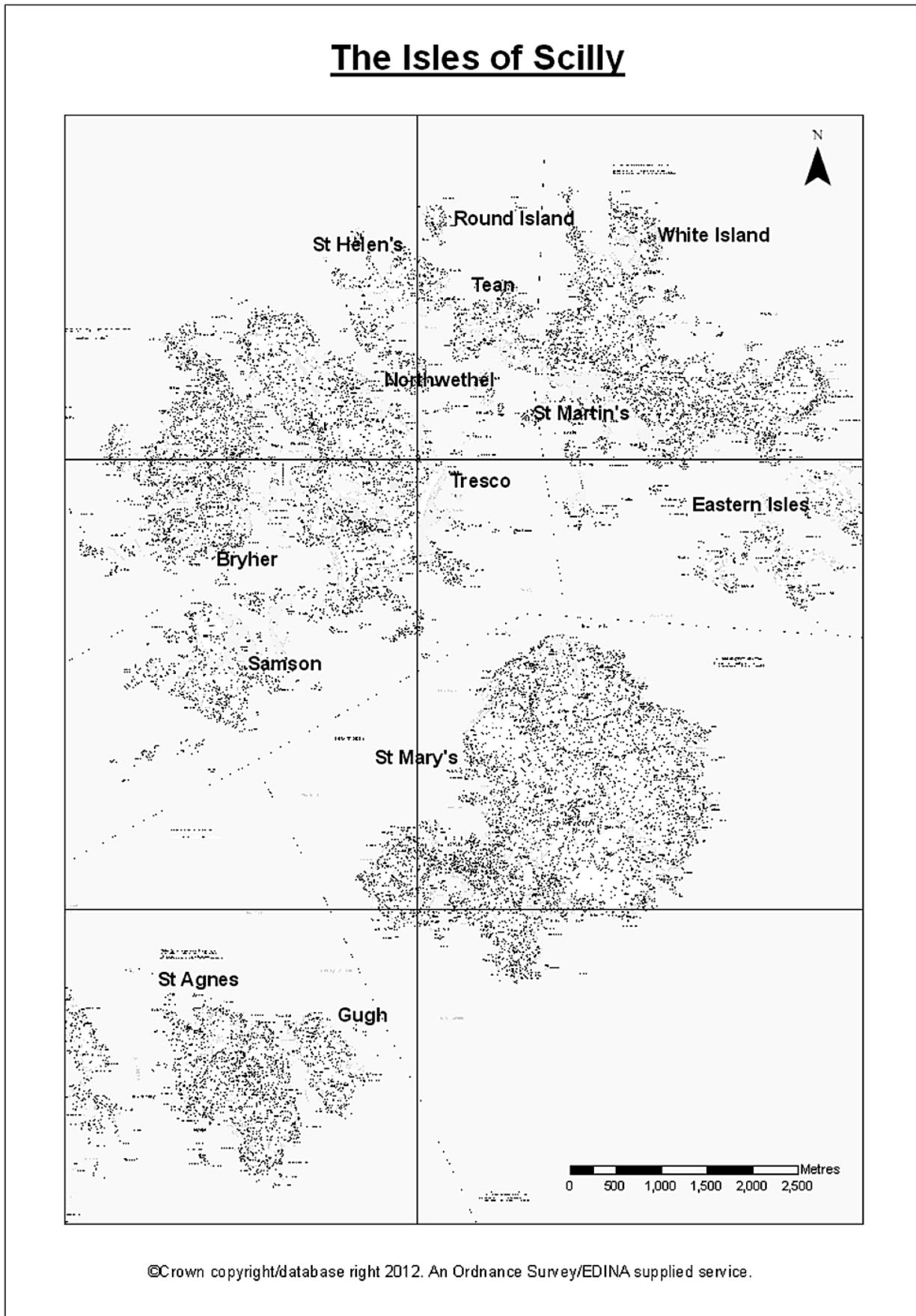


FIGURE 1.2 MAP OF THE ISLES OF SCILLY, SHOWING THE MAIN ISLANDS

workmen, some of whom made their home in the islands. Scilly's role as one of the last Royalist strongholds during the Civil War led to an influx of Royalist supporters, many of whom came from distant parts of the country. Although there are many place-names of Cornish derivation in Scilly, it appears that Cornish had died out as a spoken language in the islands by the late 16th century (Thomas 1985:36).

Scilly became part of the Duchy of Cornwall, when it was established by Edward III for his son, the Black Prince, in 1337. The Duchy leased out the entire archipelago for most of the period from 1570 until 1920. The lessees were the Godolphin family and their descendants from 1570 until 1831 followed by Augustus Smith and his heirs from 1834. The lessee was called the Lord Proprietor and had considerable autonomy. Since 1920, the Dorrien-Smith family have leased only Tresco (and, until the early 1980s, the uninhabited islands) and the other islands have been administered directly by the Duchy.

The islands have had their own council since 1891. Prior to that, local administration was undertaken by the Council of Twelve - based on 13th century leaseholder Ralph de Blanchminster's obligation to preserve the peace by using twelve armed men - and then, from 1832, by the Select Vestry. Under the 1888 Local Government Act the Council was granted the power to deal with all aspects of the islands' administration. Thomas Algernon Dorrien-Smith, as Lord Proprietor of the islands, was the first Chairman of the Council and, although the Dorrien-Smiths' hereditary position ended in 1920 with their surrender of the lease for the whole of Scilly, Arthur Dorrien-Smith was Chairman until his death in 1955 (Bennett et al. 1991).

Culturally, many islanders do not regard themselves as Cornish, but as Scillonian and English. There is no discernible interest in Cornish nationalism or in the revival of the Cornish language in Scilly and the flag of St Piran, the patron saint of Cornwall, is rarely flown there.

The islands' position on routes along the western seaways, and more recently as the first landfall following an Atlantic crossing, means that they have provided a base for shelter and reprovisioning of ships for many centuries. The regular arrival of strangers and exotic objects may have been a factor in the development of a strong island identity. Given the distinctiveness of the prehistoric Scillonian pottery, it is possible that this Scillonian identity is of considerable antiquity.

It is likely that, since Scilly was first occupied, its inhabitants have been competent seafarers. The presence of cetacean and seal remains together with a wide range of fish bones, including those from offshore waters, in settlements from the Bronze Age onwards, points to this (Ratcliffe & Straker 1996; Robinson 2007). Whether marine resources formed a significant part of the diet of the Bronze Age settlers has not been established. Stable isotope analysis from several parts of north-western Europe has shown that, whilst Mesolithic populations in coastal and

island locations relied heavily on marine foods, terrestrial resources became the main component of the diet from the Neolithic period onwards (Schulting et al. 2004).

Such analysis has not been carried out in Scilly but residues on sherds found at the Neolithic to Iron Age settlement site of Halangy Porth, St Mary's were examined and were found to be 'characteristic of oils and fats of marine fauna' (Evans 1983:37), suggesting that marine resources continued to play a part. Further studies of this kind, as well as stable isotope analysis, would help to provide a clearer picture of the prehistoric diet and economy of the islands.

Industrially, Scilly has been distinct from Cornwall in that it has no mineral resources and consequently mining has never been a part of the economy. Similarly, because of the distance to market, fishing has only ever been small scale, mainly to supply the islands' needs. In the post-mediaeval period, subsistence agriculture was the mainstay of the economy with cash income coming from pilotage and other services to shipping, salvage and kelp burning. From the mid 20th century tourism has formed the major part, currently accounting for about 85% of the islands' income, with flower farming and fishing, particularly for crabs and lobsters, making up most of the balance.

The 2011 census puts the islands' permanent population at about 2,200. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries it was somewhat higher than this and famine was a real threat on the off-islands (the inhabited islands other than St Mary's). Augustus Smith, the Lord Proprietor between 1834 and 1872, introduced various measures, including a change to the system of land inheritance, to encourage islanders to leave and this resulted in a drop in population from about 2,800 in 1840 to about 2,000 by 1900 and a significant improvement in the standard of living of the remaining islanders (Thomas 1985; Bowley 1990).

1.2 Isles of the Dead?

The islands have a wealth of archaeological sites, including more than 230 scheduled monuments and nearly 130 listed buildings (Arbery 2004). Of the prehistoric remains, one of the most striking groups is the megalithic burial chambers, which occur in unusually large numbers in the islands. Indeed, Daniel commented that:

'The Isles of Scilly are, of course, a great exception to our generalizations about the paucity and low density of burial chambers in England and Wales. These islands, with an area of between 4000 and 4500 acres (i.e. between 6 and 7 square miles) have at the present day no less than fifty chamber tombs - between a fifth and a quarter of all the chamber tombs in southern Britain. Yet Scilly is, in point of size, no more than one eight-thousandth part of England and Wales' (1950:29).

In addition, there is a smaller number of cist graves which are often found in close proximity to the megalithic chambers.

The burial chambers of Scilly form one of a number of regional groups of megalithic structures found along the Atlantic façade of Europe, the earliest - in Brittany and Iberia - dating to the mid 5th millennium BC. In the British Isles, these structures first appear in the early 4th millennium BC, a few centuries after the earliest evidence for farming communities, and some continued in use until the second millennium BC (Bradley 2000; Lynch 2004; Scarre 2007).

The large number of burial chambers in Scilly has led to speculation, in popular accounts at least (e.g. Bowley 1990), that the islands were the burial place for people, perhaps tribal leaders, who had not lived there. This has prompted some to describe Scilly as the 'Isles of the Dead'. Similar epithets have been applied to other small islands which have significant numbers of prehistoric tombs.

Pollard (1999) writes about 'Islands of the Dead', particularly in relation to Scotland, and highlights the use of small islands, both in the sea and in freshwater lochs, as burial grounds. Rainbird suggests that the physical separation of islands may have led to them being associated with death, arguing that '[t]he space provided by water acts as a social separation between the living and the dead' (2007:12). He also mentions the many references in classical literature to the dead crossing water in order to reach their final resting place. These associations with the dead led to the belief that certain islands were the home of witches or other malevolent spirits.

In Scilly, as in many other places in western Europe, prehistoric burial sites are more obvious and survive in larger numbers than the contemporary settlement sites. Given the density of distribution of burial chambers in the islands, there is a temptation to regard Scilly as a prehistoric necropolis not only for islanders but also for people from elsewhere, whose remains were taken there for burial. One implication of this is that there would have been comparatively little contemporary occupation of the islands. The research described in this book aims to test this hypothesis using the information available about the burial chambers, their contents, setting, function and relationship with settlements.

1.3 The archaeology of islands

The study of islands has, since the 1970s, developed as a discrete topic within archaeology, some approaches to it being adopted from other disciplines. One source of ideas has been biogeography. Work in this area by MacArthur and Wilson (1967) to identify the principles of island colonisation proposed the distance/area effect, which has been applied subsequently to a number of archaeological studies. This concept outlines the limitations on the colonisation of islands based on their distance from the nearest mainland but taking into account the size of the island. Consequently, large islands closer to mainlands present fewer barriers to colonisation than small islands further away. However, the presence of stepping stone islands was identified as a complicating factor.

MacArthur and Wilson's hypotheses were developed in respect of flora and fauna; when considering human colonisation of islands, Evans (1973) included the concept of locomotion – the ability of people to construct and use boats – in his analysis. The distance/area effect has been applied to a study of the sequence of colonisation of islands in the Mediterranean (Cherry 1981).

Evans' often-quoted analysis described islands as 'laboratories for the study of culture process', arguing that they were closed communities, often with a restricted range of resources available to them. This allowed contacts with the outside world to be observed more readily. Evans suggested that islands were protected from the competitive pressures of mainlands but accepted that, if technology allowed, they could be 'open to cultural stimuli from a wide variety of sources' and that this might include people arriving either deliberately or by chance. He also argued that

'Island communities often display a tendency towards the exaggerated development of some aspect of their culture, which is often connected with the ceremonial' (Evans 1973:518).

More recently, Darvill has reiterated this view, suggesting that 'islands ... provide sharply delimited physical spaces that can be used as laboratories for the study of social behaviour and the influence of both internal and external agencies' (Kirch 1986 cited in Darvill 2000). Broodbank, however, rejects much of this 'laboratory' approach, identifying four main objectives for island archaeology: firstly, the focus on archipelagos as the unit of study, secondly, the need for an 'archaeology of the sea', examining the exploitation of the sea, sea-crossings, etc, thirdly, the importance of examining material culture for evidence of social interaction and, finally, the study of pot styles, etc as signifiers of island social practices (Broodbank 2000:33-35).

Rainbird, on the other hand, stresses the diversity of ways in which island communities may perceive themselves, some regarding the sea as isolating them and others seeing it as connecting them (Rainbird 2007). He plays down the significance of islands as areas of land and stresses the importance of the sea surrounding them. Like Broodbank, he proposes an archaeology of the sea but includes islands, seascapes and the coastal parts of larger landmasses in this, in order that the experiences of all seafarers and their maritime exploits can be examined (Rainbird 1999; 2007). In considering Evans' statement about the prevalence of ceremonial sites on islands, Rainbird points out that some mainland areas, for example, Egypt and Mesoamerica, have a wealth of ceremonial sites as well.

Parker Pearson (2004) cites the need to study islands and their people in relation to their outside world and suggests that the connections required within island groups may subsequently have encouraged the development of long-distance trading networks. He describes as 'Easter Island

syndrome' the tendency in some islands for 'excessive building schemes ... [to] take over an island population's self-identity' (Parker Pearson 2004:129). He includes Orkney, Arran, the Azores, Malta, Gotland, Öland and Atlantic Scotland – but not Scilly or the Channel Islands – in the list of places where this phenomenon can be seen. The recent work of Rainbird (1999; 2007), Broodbank (2000), Parker Pearson (2004) and Scarre (2002b; 2008; 2011a; 2011d) in relation to the density of burial chambers on islands and to aspects of island identity, will be considered in chapter 9.

1.4 Scilly's prehistoric maritime connections

The nearest mainland to Scilly is west Cornwall and the islands are visible, on a clear day, from the Land's End peninsula. It is likely that the first visitors to, and the first settlers in, the islands came from there. However, the journey between the two involves the crossing of 45km of open ocean with no opportunity for shelter on the way, although it is possible that, in the early prehistoric period, there may have been small stepping stone islands at Wolf Rock and the Seven Stones.

The colonisation of Scilly can be compared with that of other island groups around the British Isles. There is evidence for Mesolithic activity on many offshore islands, including Scilly. Subsequently, the Hebrides, Orkney and the Isle of Man had all been settled by the first half of the fourth millennium BC but in Scilly, which is significantly smaller, the results of pollen analysis indicate some agricultural activity from the early third millennium BC but no permanent settlement until the late third millennium BC (Scaife 1984; Charman et al. 2012b).

The archipelago of St Kilda, some 65km west of the Outer Hebrides (which acted as stepping stone islands to it) appears to have been occupied in the Neolithic. It has been suggested that 'by about 3000BC people had developed a viable way of life [there], and the means of maintaining regular and necessary contact with the outside world.' (Fleming 2005b) Scilly is both closer to its nearest occupied neighbour than is St Kilda and larger than St Kilda. One significant difference between Scilly and St Kilda, however, is the height of the two archipelagos. St Kilda rises to 430m above sea level whereas the highest point in Scilly is just over 50m. This limitation on the visibility of Scilly on the voyage across to it may have been a factor in its relatively late colonisation (Johns et al. 2011).

There have been a number of studies examining the use of the 'western seaways' (the Irish and Celtic Seas) in the prehistoric period (e.g. Case 1969; Bowen 1972; Callaghan & Scarre 2009; Garrow & Sturt 2011). Maritime connections between Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, western Scotland and the Atlantic islands - Scilly, the Isle of Man, the Hebrides and Orkney - have relevance in relation to the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition as well as to patterns of Bronze Age exchange.

Using computer simulation to examine sailed and paddled voyages between places in the western seaways, Callaghan and Scarre established that paddled vessels could have made the journey from Brittany to Ireland in all seasons of the year with the trip taking between seven and nine days. They add:

'It is open to question whether such direct journeys were intentionally undertaken or whether contact between Brittany and Ireland relied on intermediate stopovers in south-west Britain or the Isles of Scilly' (Callaghan & Scarre 2009:367).

It is likely that, even if a direct voyage was planned, Scilly would have provided a refuge in bad weather or if other difficulties were encountered.

Garrow and Sturt, in reviewing the role of the western seaways in the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition, stress the difficult maritime conditions likely to have been encountered in the North Sea between 5000 and 3000BC as low-lying islands and sand flats were inundated by rising sea levels. In contrast, they say, 'the western seaways represent a clear and open maritime route' which experienced much smaller changes, although they acknowledge that navigation there was not easy (2011:63).

There is limited evidence for Mesolithic presence in Scilly with some flint artefacts from this period (Berridge & Roberts 1986); there is also an indication from the pollen sequence at Higher Moors, St Mary's of possible human disturbance at about 5500 to 5000BC (Scaife 1984). Recent excavation by Garrow and Sturt near Old Quay on St Martin's has uncovered flint and other stone artefacts from both the Mesolithic and Neolithic, Neolithic pottery and possible evidence, in the form of ditches and post-holes, for structures (Garrow & Sturt 2014). Robinson (2007) believes that it is unlikely that the islands were permanently inhabited at this time but suggests that they may have been occupied seasonally for fishing, the collecting of shellfish and the hunting of sea mammals.

Garrow and Sturt argue that there was a 'continuity of practice' in the western seaways from the fifth millennium BC onwards, that this involved regular short-distance sea crossings and that longer voyages, including the one between Scilly and Cornwall, were 'commonly made' (2011:67). If this were the case, Scilly would have been part of a network of maritime connections which included Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland and Scotland.

Imported objects of Neolithic date in Scilly include sherds of Hembury Ware from south-west England and gabbroic pottery from Cornwall, both found at the occupation site of East Porth, Samson. In the later burial chambers, small bronze objects and glass and faience beads have been found. Several pieces of pumice are known from prehistoric sites in Scilly, the only recorded examples of this substance in the British Isles outside Scotland. Whilst it is conceivable that the pumice floated from Iceland, its

likely place of origin, to Scilly, the possibility also exists that it was brought to the islands by travellers from further north. The provenance of the bronze, glass and faience is not known but it has been argued that the use of seagoing, sewn-plank boats from the early second millennium BC allowed the development of networks of exchange of prestige goods (Van de Noort 2003).

Later, at the sixth and seventh century AD settlement on Teän, there is evidence for trade with the Mediterranean, not only in the form of imported pottery but also because two of the skeletons found in the Christian cemetery there showed signs of leprosy (Ratcliffe & Johns 2003). By the twelfth century, the monks at the Benedictine priory on Tresco were engaged in long distance trade; the *Orkneyinga-saga* records the plundering of one of their merchant ships.

In summary, whilst it is not possible to be certain about the extent of maritime connections between Scilly and elsewhere in the prehistoric period, it is clear that such connections did exist. Scilly should not, therefore, be regarded as an isolated outpost, unaffected by changes and developments elsewhere but as part of a network of islands and mainlands in the western seaways.

1.5 Outline of work

Although the chambered cairns and cists in Scilly have been written about since the 18th century, there has previously been no systematic study focusing on the structures, their contents, their setting and their affiliations. The first radiocarbon dates from a Scillonian entrance grave have been recently obtained and allow the chronology of the sites to be considered in a wider context. This has not previously been possible because of the lack of mainland comparators for much of the prehistoric pottery from the islands. Whilst non-funerary functions for the entrance graves were proposed by Ashbee (1976) and Thomas (1985), there has been no recent consideration of this aspect. This research aims to address these gaps.

Chapter 2 reviews recent approaches to the study of megalithic burial chambers and considers their application to Scilly. This appraisal is used to guide the approach taken in the research reported here. Chapter 3 provides a critical review of the previous research carried out into the Scillonian entrance graves and cists, including the work of George Bonsor between 1899 and 1902. Bonsor's unpublished notebooks about his visits to Scilly were discovered during the course of this study and the contents have added considerably to our knowledge of several sites.

Chapter 4 outlines the physical characteristics of both the entrance graves and the cists and assesses the numbers of each, both extant and destroyed, as well as reviewing the records of excavation. Chapter 5 examines the contents, including artefacts, human remains and other substances, found in both entrance graves and cists and reviews the significance of the assemblages at two excavated sites.

Chapter 6 addresses the setting of the sites, considering both the likely pattern of destruction and the impact of sea level rise on them and using GIS-based mapping to examine aspects of their distribution. In chapter 7 the function of the sites is discussed and possible reasons for their density in Scilly are reviewed. Chapter 8 considers evidence for the dating of the sites and evaluates the radiocarbon dates from two sites obtained during the course of this research.

Chapter 9 examines the basis for comparisons made between the entrance graves and cists of Scilly and megalithic structures in other parts of the British Isles and Brittany and considers the significance of any similarities; chapter 10 draws together the key outcomes of the research and suggests some future lines of enquiry. Appendix 1 is a catalogue of all 197 sites considered, appendix 2 is a concordance of sites and appendix 3 contains extracts from George Bonsor's notebooks about his visits to Scilly between 1899 and 1902.

1.6 Terminology

A wide variety of terms has been used to describe the monuments under consideration in this work. In the 18th and 19th centuries, descriptions such as 'Giants' Graves', 'Caves', 'Burrows' or 'Barrows', 'Cromlechs' and 'Kistvaens' were used (Borlase 1756; Troutbeck 1796; Woodley 1822; Smith 1863).

It was not until the early 20th century that two distinct monument types were identified and named. Crawford distinguished between the cist: 'a small box consisting of four stones set in the ground at right-angles to each other and generally covered by a fifth' and the burial-chamber, which 'consists of large ... stones; or ... a dry wall of small stones' with a roof of 'either a large capstone, or a corbelled vault of small stones' (1928:418).

Hencken (1932:15) expanded this definition by introducing a three-fold classification of burial chambers: passage-graves (chambers approached by a stone built passage), covered galleries (passages with no chamber at the end) and closed chambers (built of large stones but with no entrance). He also refers to cists as a separate category. Childe, however, said that 'A small group of collective tombs in Cornwall, the Scilly Isles and south-eastern Ireland are generally classed as entrance graves' (Childe 1940, quoted in Ashbee 1974:73).

It was Daniel who, building on Montelius's classificatory work, introduced the concept of two distinct movements of megalithic grave builders across western and northern Europe leading to two types of structure: the passage grave and the gallery grave (Daniel 1941). Daniel describes 'entrance graves' as being a form of passage grave which does not have a clear distinction between the passage and the chamber and regards the monuments in Scilly as belonging to this category.

Later, Daniel provided definitions of the terms 'burial chamber' – a burial vault – and 'chamber tomb' – used to

denote both the chamber and associated structures such as barrows (1950:3). He goes on to say:

‘To my mind all the burial chambers in the Scilly group are to be classed as undifferentiated passage graves or entrance graves, the various forms ... representing various degrees in the formal divorce of passage and chamber, from form (*a*) which Hencken actually classifies as a passage grave, to form (*d*), which might almost be described as a gallery grave’ (1950:64).

Piggott describes the chamber and passage in Scillonian chambered tombs as having ‘lost any structural distinction’ and agrees with Daniel that the sites are ‘derivative from the passage grave series’ (1954a:264-265).

Ashbee, having reviewed the varying descriptions used by earlier authors, believes that the term ‘entrance graves’ is a misnomer as ‘the entrance ... is normally the least prominent and distinctive characteristic of the series’ and goes on to suggest that ‘Scillonian chamber tombs’ should be employed as the descriptive term (1974:74). However, two years later, his article about Bant’s Carn was sub-titled ‘An Entrance Grave Restored and Reconsidered’ (Ashbee 1976).

Although Thomas (1985) uses the term ‘entrance-grave’ only to describe sites in Cornwall and refers to those in Scilly as ‘chambered cairns’, the majority of more recent authors have described the Scillonian sites as ‘entrance graves’. This is the term used in the Historic Environment Record for Cornwall and Scilly (HES 1987-2005) for both the Cornish and Scillonian sites and it is also employed by other recent authors (e.g. Ratcliffe 1989; Ratcliffe & Johns 2003; Kirk 2004; Robinson 2007).

The definition of ‘entrance grave’ in the National Monuments Record Thesaurus is ‘A form of Neolithic burial monument primarily found in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. It comprises a round cairn, usually with a retaining wall or kerb, and an entrance leading directly into a chamber.’ (English Heritage nd)

Consequently, in this work, the term ‘entrance grave’ will be used to describe structures consisting of a stone-built chamber with an opening at one end, covered by a mound of earth and stones. A coffin-like stone box, constructed of slabs and covered by one or more capstones, will be referred to as a ‘cist’. ‘Indeterminate sites’ are those badly damaged structures which may be either an entrance grave or a cist. There is also a small number of sites which are similar in size and construction to entrance graves but which have a sealed chamber with no entrance; these are described as ‘megalithic cists’. The question of whether the sole or primary purpose of the entrance graves was, in fact, burial will be considered in chapter 7.

1.7 A note on nomenclature

Comment should also be made about the names used to describe the archipelago under consideration. Although, in

the past, ‘Scilly Isles’, ‘Scilly Islands’ or ‘the Scillies’ were used as the normal descriptors, the present day inhabitants prefer that their home is called the ‘Isles of Scilly’ or just ‘Scilly’; these terms will therefore be used.

In Scilly, a natural granite outcrop, termed a ‘tor’ on Dartmoor and elsewhere, is known as a ‘carn’. This word occurs frequently in Scillonian place-names, including those of several of the entrance graves which are located close to one of these features. The similarity between the words ‘carn’ and ‘cairn’ has caused much confusion and has led to site names being incorrectly quoted in many references. This has happened particularly in respect of the well-preserved entrance grave site of Bant’s Carn on St Mary’s, where the nearby carn itself was apparently removed early in the 20th century.

1.8 Radiocarbon dates

In order to ensure consistency and to facilitate comparison, the radiocarbon determinations included in this work have all been calibrated using OxCal 4.2 and the IntCal13 calibration curve (Bronk Ramsey 2013; Reimer et al. 2013). All dates are expressed at the 2 SD (95.4%) confidence level. This means that the calibrated dates in this work may vary significantly from those shown in the publications where they have previously appeared.