

# Neolithic and Beaker pits, Bronze Age roundhouses and Iron Age fields and burial above the Loe valley: a summary report on excavations at Higher Nansloe Farm, Helston, 2017

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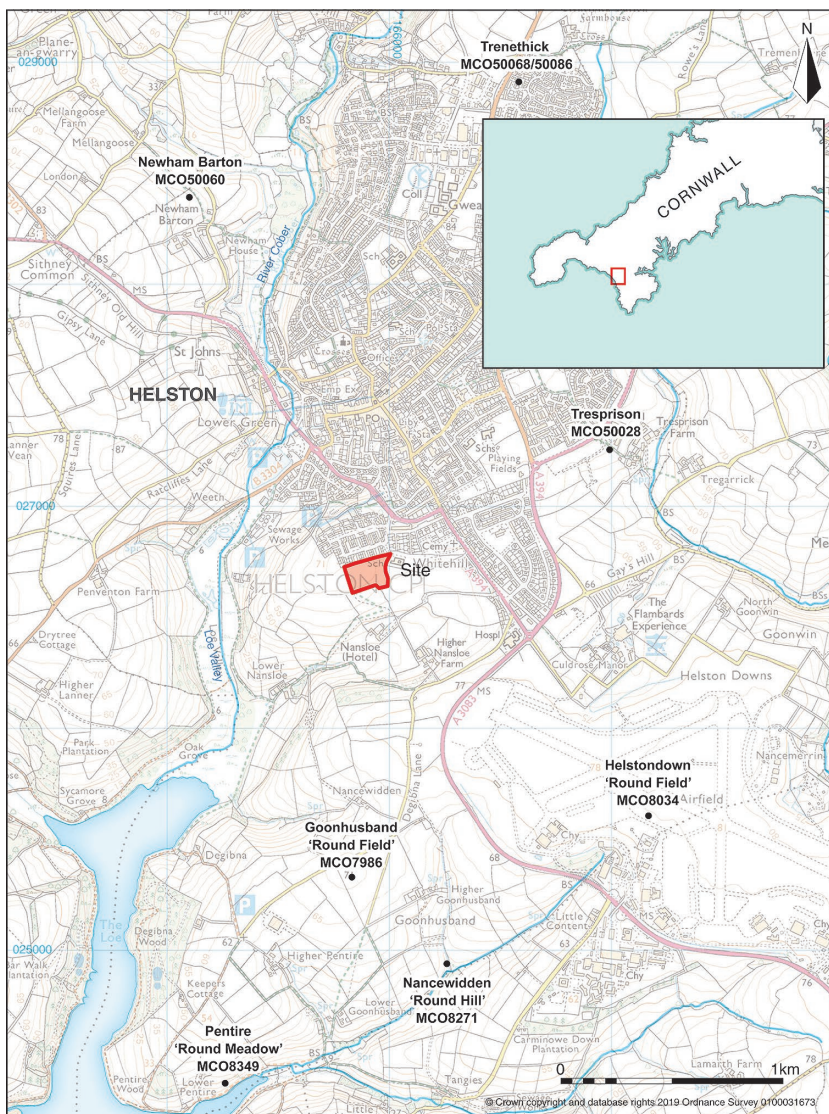
with a contribution from GRACE JONES and HENRIETTA QUINNELL

*In 2017 Cotswold Archaeology undertook excavations at Higher Nansloe Farm, Helston. The earliest remains comprised a small assemblage of Late Mesolithic to Early Neolithic flints, seven Early Neolithic pits and a Beaker period pit. A pair of Middle Bronze Age sunken-floored roundhouses was also found, and these showed evidence for deliberate dismantling. Occupation resumed in the Late Bronze Age when a possible roundhouse was built, perhaps within an enclosure. Early to Middle Iron Age rectilinear fields were found across the site, associated with funnel-like entrances and trackways. Other Iron Age remains included a concentration of pits which might have been related to cooking, and a group of three graves. One of these graves produced a notable assemblage of metalwork, including a spearhead and knife blade; another yielded the largest assemblage of Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery yet retrieved from a single feature in the south west. A possible square or rectangular building lacked dating evidence but might have been Iron Age or Early Neolithic.*

Between April and June 2017 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) undertook excavations at Higher Nansloe Farm, Helston (centred on NGR SW 65897 26703; Fig 1) at the request of Coastline Design and Build Ltd. The site is 2.3 ha in extent, 0.39 ha of which was selected for archaeological excavation within four areas. Prior to the current development, the site comprised a grass field. It is located just off the brow of a hill (71m aOD), part of high ground forming the eastern slope of the valley of the River Cober. The river flows through

the Loe valley 600m to the west before emptying into the sea at Porthleven Sands, 3.2 km distant. The site overlies slate and siltstone of the Mylor Slate Formation (BGS 2016).

The earliest recorded remains in the locality comprise several possible Iron Age or Roman ‘rounds’ (enclosed settlements) recorded within the Cornwall Historic Environment Record (HER; Fig 1). However, while some are suggested by curvilinear cropmarks and others indicated by place-names, none have been tested by excavation.



*Fig 1 Site location plan, also showing the distribution of Iron Age or Romano-British enclosed settlements ('rounds'), as recorded in the Cornwall Historic Environment Record. The three northern sites were identified as cropmarks but the southern sites are suggested only by field-names, such as 'Round Field'.*

During the medieval period, the site lay within the rural hinterland of Helston town and Nansloe hamlet and it remained in agricultural use until the present development.

Archaeological work within the site began with a geophysical survey (AOC 2016) and evaluation (CA 2016) which identified Iron Age field boundary ditches and pits. Based on these results, Cornwall Council requested archaeological excavation within two areas (Areas 1 and 2; Fig 2). Five additional trenches were excavated along the site's eastern edge to test for the presence of

a possible boundary for a round. In the event, no such boundary was encountered but the five trenches did contain significant remains not detected during the preliminary works, and they were therefore extended to become two additional excavation areas (Trenches 8 and 9). This report presents a summary of the findings, full details of which are available in a report published on CA's website (CA 2020).

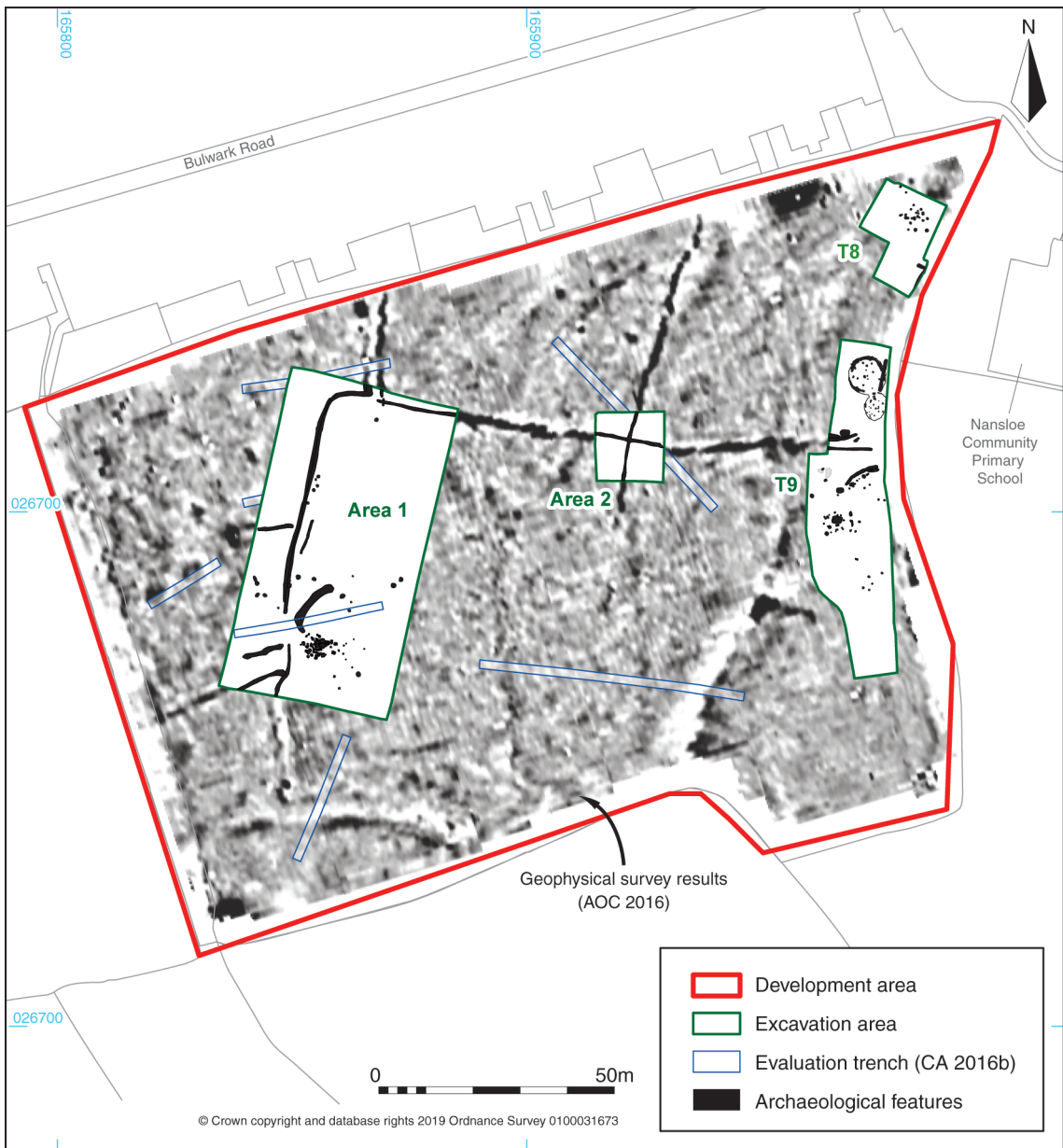


Fig 2 The site, showing excavation areas, evaluation trenches, geophysical survey results and archaeological features. Area 1 included Neolithic pits, a Beaker pit and an Iron Age pit group. T8 contained a possible Late Bronze Age structure and in T9 were Middle Bronze Age houses and Iron Age burials.

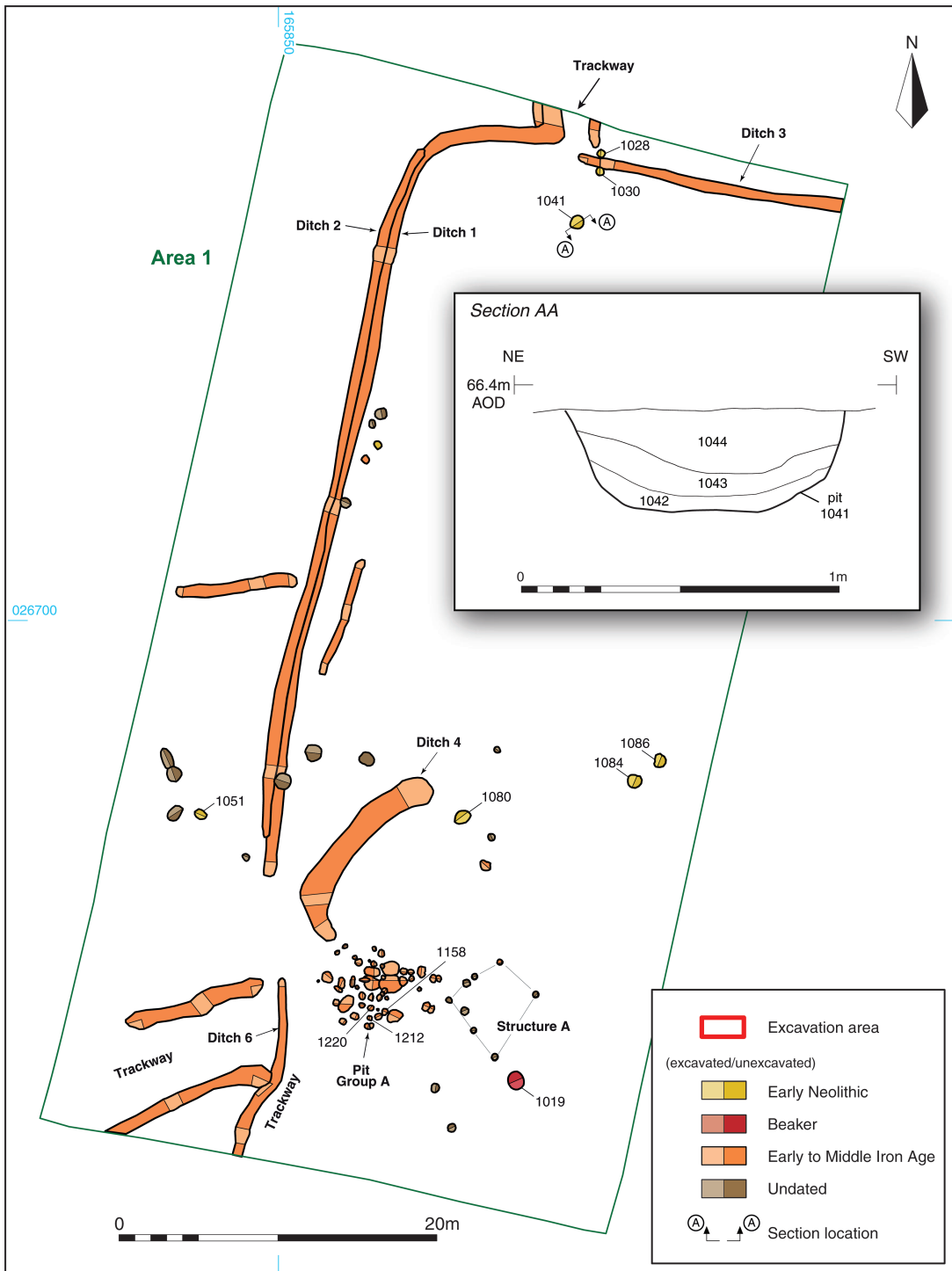


Fig 3 Plan of Area 1, with inset showing section through Early Neolithic pit [1041]. Early Neolithic pits: a group of three in the north, [1028], [1030] and [1041]; and a line of four to the south: [1051], [1080], [1084] and [1086]. Beaker pit: [1019]. Pit group A: this produced Middle–Late Iron Age radiocarbon dates and pit [1158] contained an iron ferrule (Fig 9, 4).

## Results

Archaeological remains were found within all the excavated areas and are reported on below. Calibrated radiocarbon dates are quoted at the 95.4 per cent confidence level.

### Early Neolithic (4000–3000 BC)

Seven pits scattered across Area 1 (Fig 3) produced small quantities of Early Neolithic gabbroic coarse ware pottery (127 sherds, 1438g). The forms included large vessels with possible cordons or lugs, and simple, open bowls (Fig 4, **P1–7**). Flint assemblages consistent with Early Neolithic dating were recovered from some of the pits, and a few more flints, probably of the same date, were found in residual contexts elsewhere on the site. The 53 flints were mostly debitage (knapping debris), in the form of flakes, blades and bladelets, but seven flints show secondary working as tools, including three scrapers and a microdenticulate, tool types used for hide and plant processing. Most of the pits were bowl-shaped cuts 0.45m to 1.05m wide and 0.1m to 0.35m deep with single fills. In contrast, pit [1041] in the northern half of Area 1 was a steep-sided, flat-based cut, containing three horizontal fills (Fig 3, section AA) which together produced flints, pottery and charred plant remains, including hazelnut shells, apple-type fruit, barley and hulled wheat grain fragments and an emmer wheat spikelet fork. One of the charred hazelnut shells from the second fill (1043) was radiocarbon dated to 3648–3522 cal BC (SUERC-87421).

### Beaker period (2400–1800 BC)

Pit [1019], within the southern part of Area 1 (Fig 3), contained five sherds (42g) from a Beaker pottery vessel of gabbroic fabric, decorated with scored lines made using a cockle shell and horizontal rows of square impressions (Fig 4, **P8**).

### Middle Bronze Age (1500–1100 BC)

Middle Bronze remains comprised two roundhouses and associated features in Trench 9, on a gentle south-east facing slope (Figs 5–6, 8). These are dated by the presence of gabbroic pottery (60 sherds, 515g) which includes sherds with impressed cord decoration comparable to Trevisker pottery (Fig 4, **P9–11**). The gabbroic fabrics

included a few sherds of gabbroic admixture, having a granitic component which could have been added locally.

Roundhouse 1 was built into a circular cut 7.5m in diameter and 0.55m deep (Figs 5 and 6). A drystone wall (9004, 9005, 9059) built against the inner face of the cut survived intermittently as a single course of granite blocks; granite is not local to the site, but sources are present 4 km to the north east on the Wendron Moors and 5.5 km to the west around Ashton. No flooring survived but postholes forming a post-ring 0.5m inside the wall line may have held upright roof supports. Near the centre of the roundhouse was shallow oval feature [9226] which contained a single deposit of scorched clay, perhaps the remnant of a hearth lining or oven superstructure, although a sample of the fill produced only a single charred barley grain (*Hordeum vulgare*).

Two layers within the roundhouse post-dated the postholes and wall line and relate to its disuse. A thin silty clay layer (9006), with oak and hazel charcoal and a single charred barley grain, perhaps derived from the possible hearth / oven. Rubble layer (9008) derived from the roundhouse walling and produced three abraded sherds of decorated Trevisker pottery. These deposits only partially filled the roundhouse hollow; the remaining depth was filled by two silty bulk deposits which yielded 19 sherds of Trevisker pottery.

Roundhouse 2 was built into an oval cut 5.5m long, 4.25m wide and 0.3m deep which adjoined the cut for roundhouse 1 via a short passageway. A segment of stone wall, (9159), survived along the inner edge of the cut. No floor survived, but postholes and stakeholes were present, some of which may have held an oval arrangement of roof supports. Feature [9188], near the centre of the base, contained scorched clay and is interpreted as a hearth or oven. These structural remains were overlain by demolition deposits, the earliest of which, layer (9165), produced three sherds of Trevisker pottery, one with impressed cord decoration. Above this, rubble layer (9022) derived from the former walling. It yielded eight sherds of pottery (including Fig 4, **P11**), a stone saddle quern / grinding slab, and half of a large stone used as a grain rubber, as well as a moderate assemblage of charred cereal grains, mainly barley, but also hulled wheat and emmer / spelt wheat (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*). The remaining hollow was filled with brown silty clay which produced 24 small

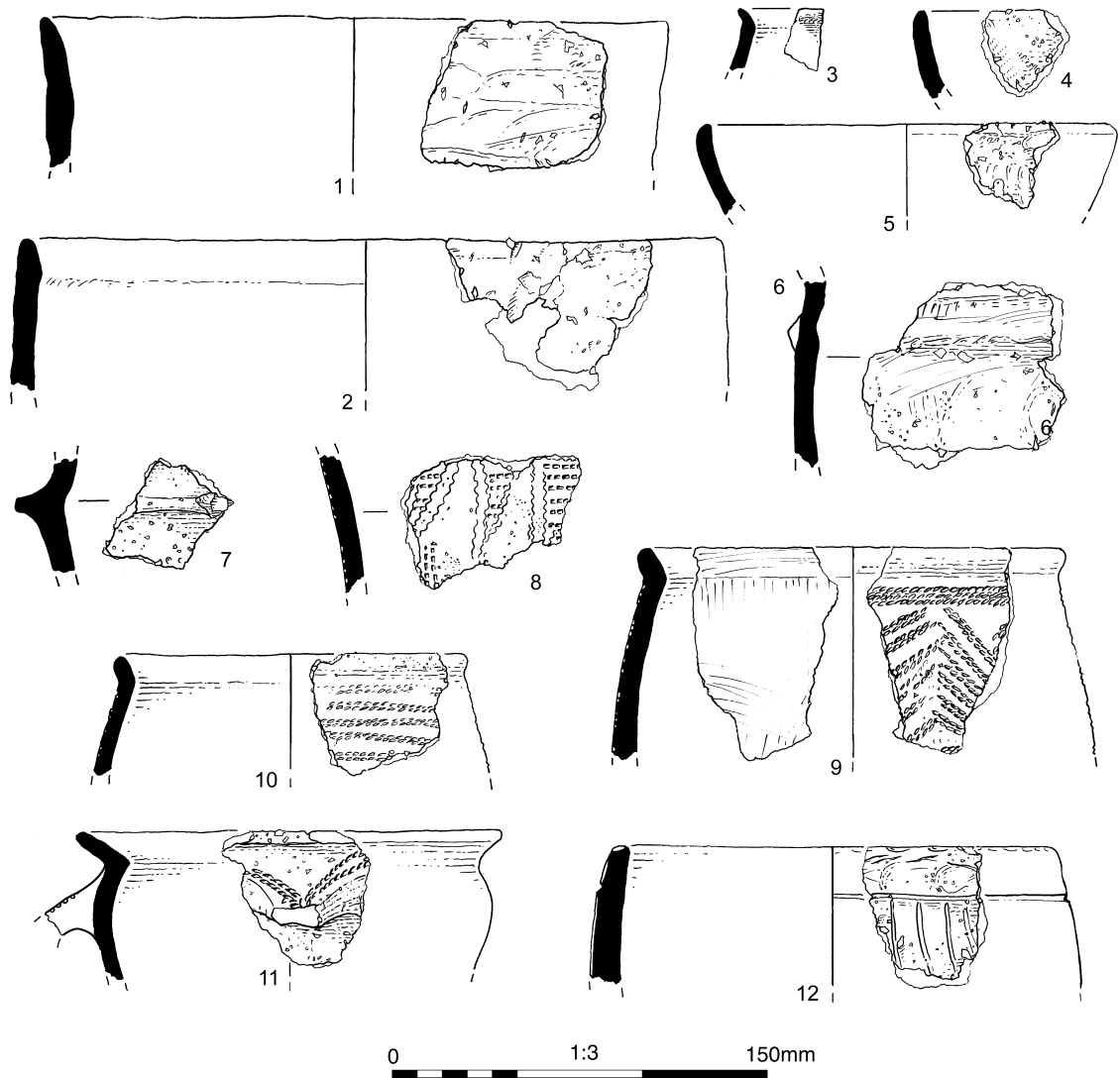


Fig 4 Selected early prehistoric pottery: P1–7 Early Neolithic gabbroic coarse ware; P8 Beaker vessel with shell-impressed and cord-impressed decoration; P9–11 Middle Bronze Age Trevisker pottery; P12 late form of Trevisker pottery. (For full descriptions see G Jones 2020a, 46–51.)

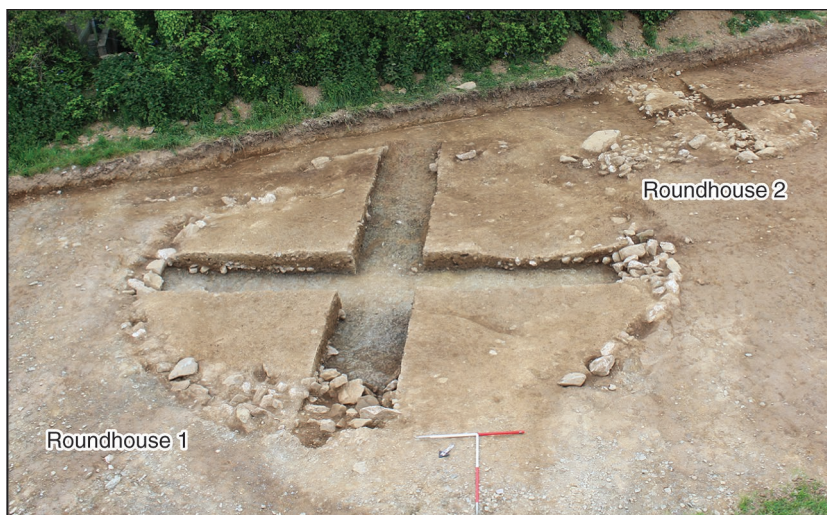
sherds of Trevisker pottery and a perforated slate disk, possibly a vessel lid.

Posthole [9074], 20m south west of roundhouse 2 (Fig 8), was 0.95m wide and 0.6m deep and contained granite packing stones. A decorated Trevisker ware jar rim sherd (Fig 4, P9) came from its uppermost backfill. Some 5m to the north east of this were two small pits, [9033] and [9052], of which pit [9033] had been cut into one of two

adjacent infilled tree-throw holes. It also produced a rim sherd from a decorated Trevisker ware jar (Fig 4, P10).

#### Late Bronze Age (1100–700 BC)

Late Bronze Age remains were found within Trench 8, 25m north east of the earlier roundhouses (Fig 7). They comprised shallow ditch terminal



*Fig 5 Roundhouses 1 and 2, looking south-east (1m scales). (Photograph: Cotswold Archaeology.)*

[8005] and an amorphous cluster of postholes and small pits, these possibly indicating the presence of a circular structure (structure B), some 6.5m in diameter. They were dated to the early part of the Late Bronze Age by the presence of 11 sherds in a late form of Trevisker ware pottery. **P12** (Fig 4), from posthole [8042], in a gabbroic admixture fabric, has incised linear decoration and is similar in form and decoration to a bowl from Porthleven (Quinnell 2011b, fig 17, P5); the Porthleven assemblage displays traits of the Trevisker tradition but is associated with late radiocarbon dates of 1120–910 cal BC and 1130–910 cal BC.

A small quantity of charred plant remains, including barley, was recovered from posthole [8050].

### **Early to Middle Iron Age (600–100 BC)**

The remains of an Iron Age field system, up to three graves and clusters of pits and postholes (pit group A) were revealed in Areas 1 and 2 and Trench 9 (Figs 3 and 8). These have been broadly dated by Iron Age pottery (192 sherds, 500g). For the majority of the Iron Age features, the recovered pottery was only broadly datable, but the assemblage includes an important collection of Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group sherds of the sixth to fourth centuries BC, associated with one of the graves (Jones and Quinnell, below), and sherds in the Middle Iron Age South Western Decorated tradition dating to the fourth to first centuries BC collected from pit group A.

### *The field system*

The field system, revealed in combination by the various phases of investigation, extended across the site (Fig 2) and included rectilinear fields together with trackways. The ditches defining these were broad, shallow cuts with homogenous silty clay fills which produced a few sherds of late prehistoric pottery. Within Area 1, a trackway leading to a field from the south west had been blocked off by ditch 6 which formed the edge of another trackway leading from the south (Fig 3). North of this, an entrance gap led into the field where a short ditch (ditch 4) may have been intended to funnel or sort livestock, perhaps protecting pit group A (described below) to its south. A funnel-shaped entrance was evident within Trench 9, defined by ditches 3 and 7 (Fig 8).

### *Pit group A*

To the immediate south of ditch 4 was a dense concentration of 51 shallow pits and postholes, labelled as pit group A on Figure 3. Some were intercutting, while a dark layer including charcoal and scorching (1205; not illustrated) sealed some of these features and was itself cut by others, overall suggesting some longevity to the represented activity. Many of the pits / postholes contained dark deposits which produced scorched stones, fired clay and charred plant remains, including grains of barley, emmer wheat and spelt wheat, hazelnut shell fragments and seeds of oat / brome grass and celtic bean. These features also produced small

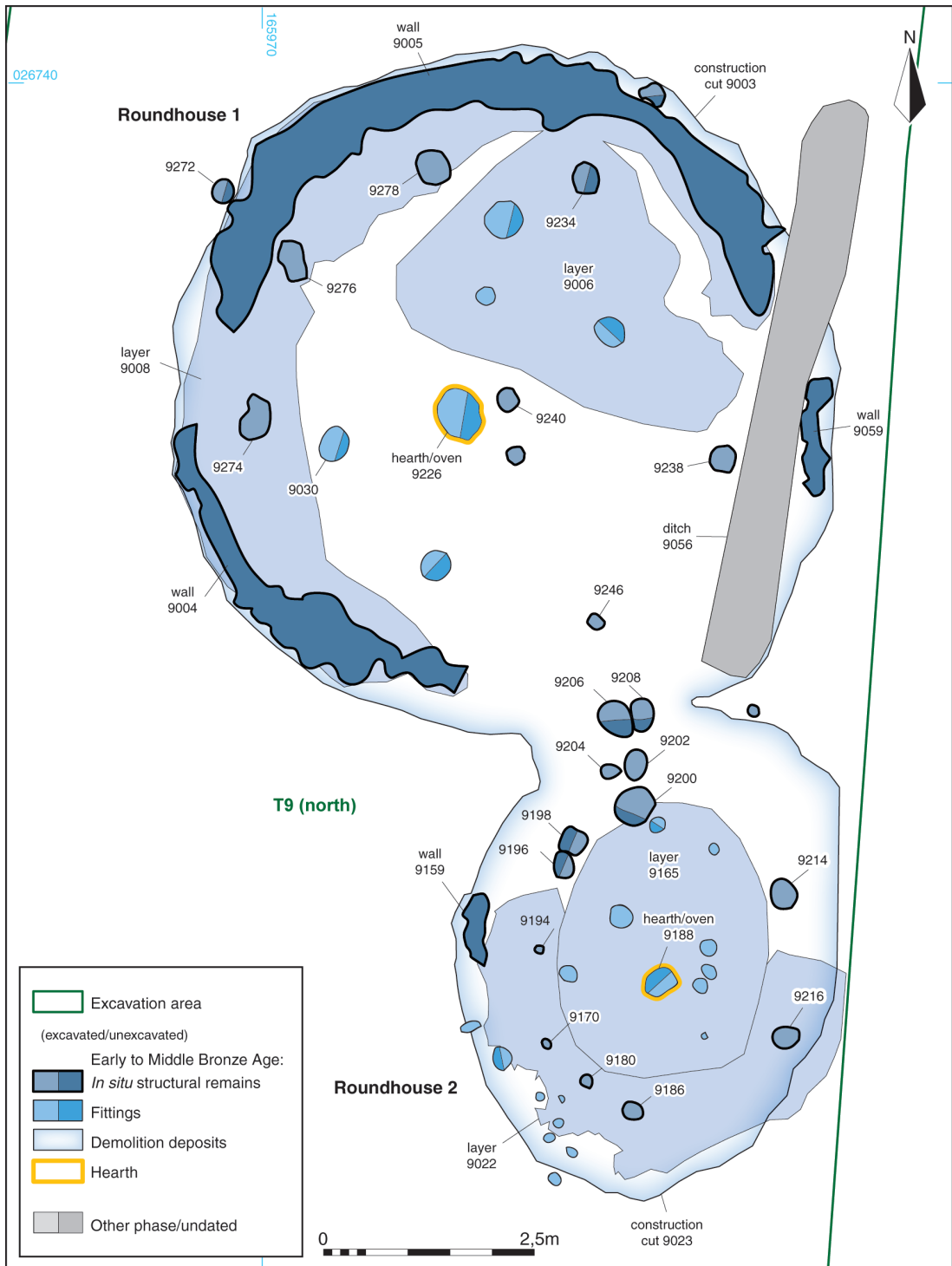


Fig 6 Plan of roundhouses 1 and 2.

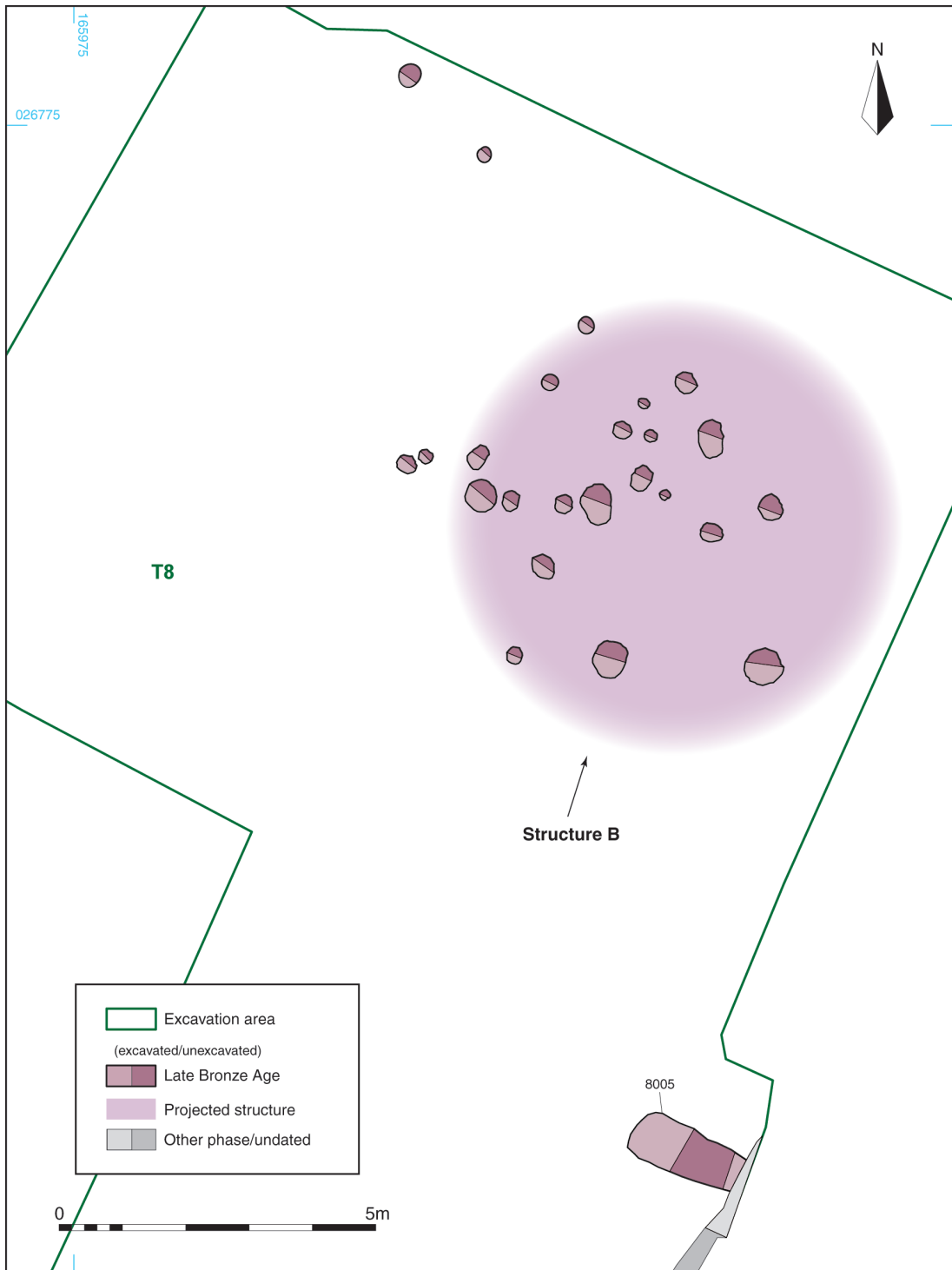


Fig 7 Plan of Late Bronze Age remains in Trench 8.

quantities of burnt bone, unidentifiable to species, and not specifically identifiable as either animal or human, as well as charcoal, mainly from oak, with small quantities of hazel. Among this group, pit [1158] yielded a folded iron strip with a rivet hole and with mineral-preserved wood (Fig 9, 4). The item cannot be identified with any certainty, but might have been a spear butt. Hazel charcoal from pits [1220] and [1212] produced radiocarbon determinations of 355–58 cal BC and 174–1 cal BC respectively (SUERC-87423 and SUERC-87422), ranges spanning the Middle to Late Iron Age.

The pottery from the pit group was Iron Age and included a small amount of material closely identifiable as of the Middle Iron Age South Western Decorated tradition

Immediately east of pit group A was a rectilinear arrangement of postholes which seems to have defined a small fenced enclosure or a building, structure A, 4.1m by 3.8m in extent (Fig 3). None of the postholes contained dating evidence and structure A is of uncertain date; Early Neolithic pits and Beaker pit [1019] were also nearby.

### *Burial activity*

Iron Age remains within Trench 9 comprised two cist graves, a possible pit grave and a few pits and postholes (Fig 8). Immediately south of field entrance ditch 7, an alignment of postholes may have supported the posts of a fence line. Postholes [9050] and [9047], 2m south of this fence line, were set 1.25m apart and may have supported posts for a two-post structure such as a drying rack; a similar posthole pair was present 4m to their south east (not illustrated).

The two stone cists were found south west of ditch 7. Although neither contained evidence of inhumation burials and only one contained small quantities of unidentifiable burnt bone, both are interpreted as graves on the assumption that any unburnt bone has been lost to the acidic soils. The stones of the cists included slate and quartz, local to the site, but also granite. (For section drawings of the cists see CA 2020, figs 12–14.)

Cist [9101] was east–west aligned, in a cut 1.25m long, 0.95m wide and 0.55m deep, and had been lined and capped with stones; internally it was 1.2m long, 0.75m wide and 0.6m high. No bone or artefactual material was found within it.

Cist [9253], 5m south of cist [9101], was built on a slightly different alignment. It was in a cut

2.1m long, 1.05m wide and 0.4m deep, lined along its base and sides with substantial stone blocks and slabs creating an internal space 0.95m long, 0.95m wide and 0.5m deep. Capping stones were absent, although this may reflect truncation. The cist contained a blackish lower fill which produced a large assemblage of charred cereal grains, mainly barley with some emmer and spelt wheat. Other remains included charred hazelnut shell fragments and oak and hazel charcoal. Above this lower fill, and extending beyond the cist to the edges of the construction cut, was the upper fill, another blackish deposit. This produced two small fragments of unidentifiable burnt bone, an unburnt grain rubbing stone and a group of three iron objects comprising part of a spearhead with mineral-preserved wood from the shaft (and a fragment of unidentifiable unburnt bone adhering to the concretion), part of a curved knife blade, and a bar fragment (Fig 9, 1–3). The metal items were found outside the cist, although within the construction cut, but it is unclear whether this represents post-depositional disturbance or their intended locations.

Cist [9253] lay within a cluster of pits and postholes, among which an oval arrangement of postholes (structure D) may represent a structure or screen surrounding the cist. Two layers extending to the immediate east seem to represent material ploughed out from the cist, including parts of its structure and fills. One layer contained a large saddle quern which may have originated as a grave good within the cist, or may have been deliberately placed as part of the cist structure itself. The second layer included charred plant remains, primarily barley grains but also emmer and wheat grains and chaff, along with unidentifiable fragments of burnt bone.

Possible grave [9129], south of cist [9253], was a vertical-sided circular cut 0.8m wide and 0.75m deep. A sample from its lowest fill produced a large assemblage of charred cereal grains, mostly barley with a few hulled wheat grains, as well as small quantities of burnt bone, unidentifiable to species, and two pieces of copper wire, possibly from a brooch spring. Above this was a sandy silt fill which produced further charred cereal grains. These lower fills were sealed by a horizontal stone slab above which the third fill was deposited along with a stone saddle quern or grain rubber and a possible stone grain rubber fragment. The uppermost fill was a grey-brown silty clay. Together these fills, both below and above the stone slab, produced

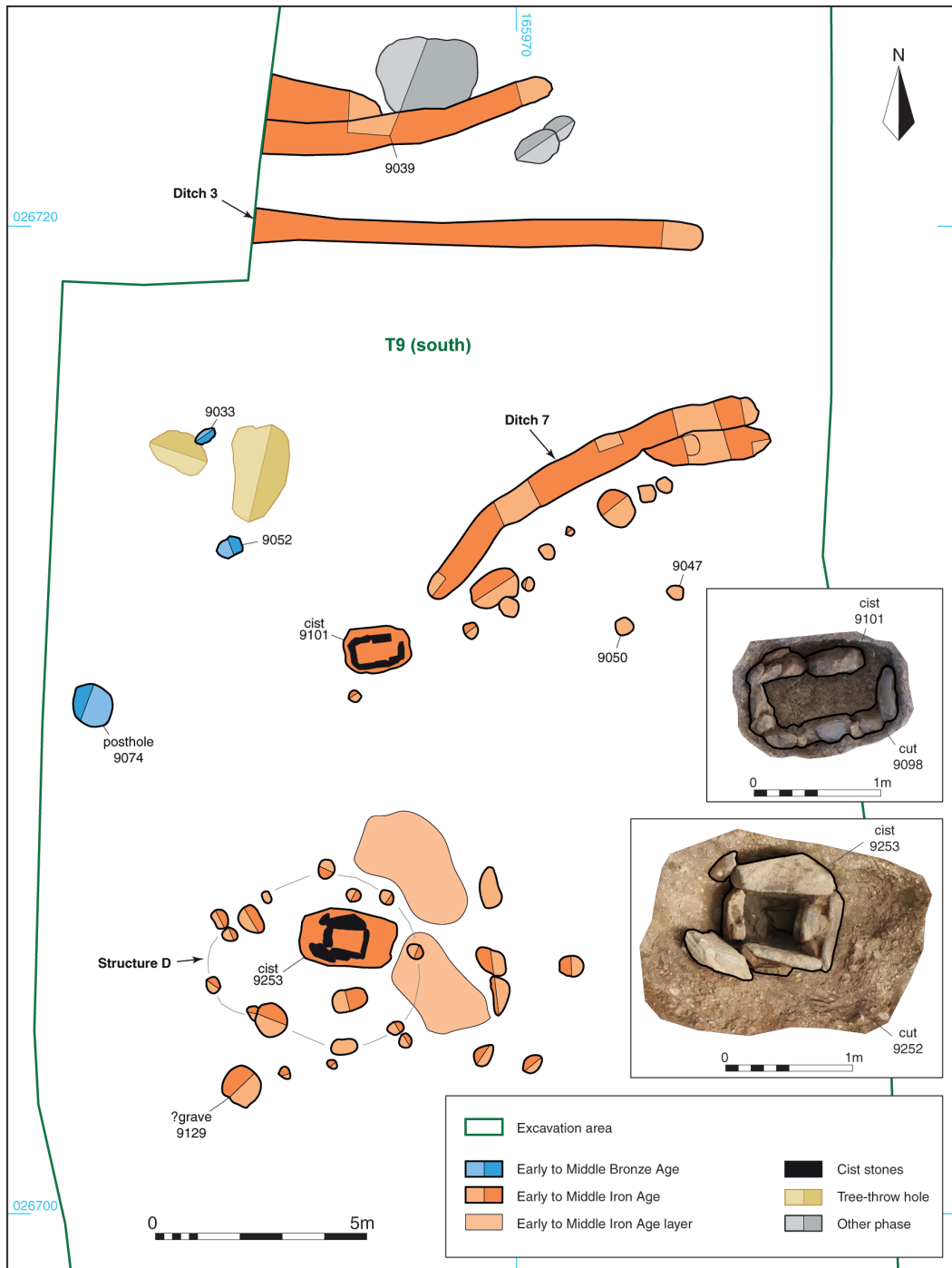


Fig 8 Plan of archaeological features within Trench 9 (south). Cist [9253] is associated with three iron objects (Fig 9, 1–3), and possible grave [9129] contained pieces of copper wire and a large assemblage of Early Iron Age pottery (Fig 10).

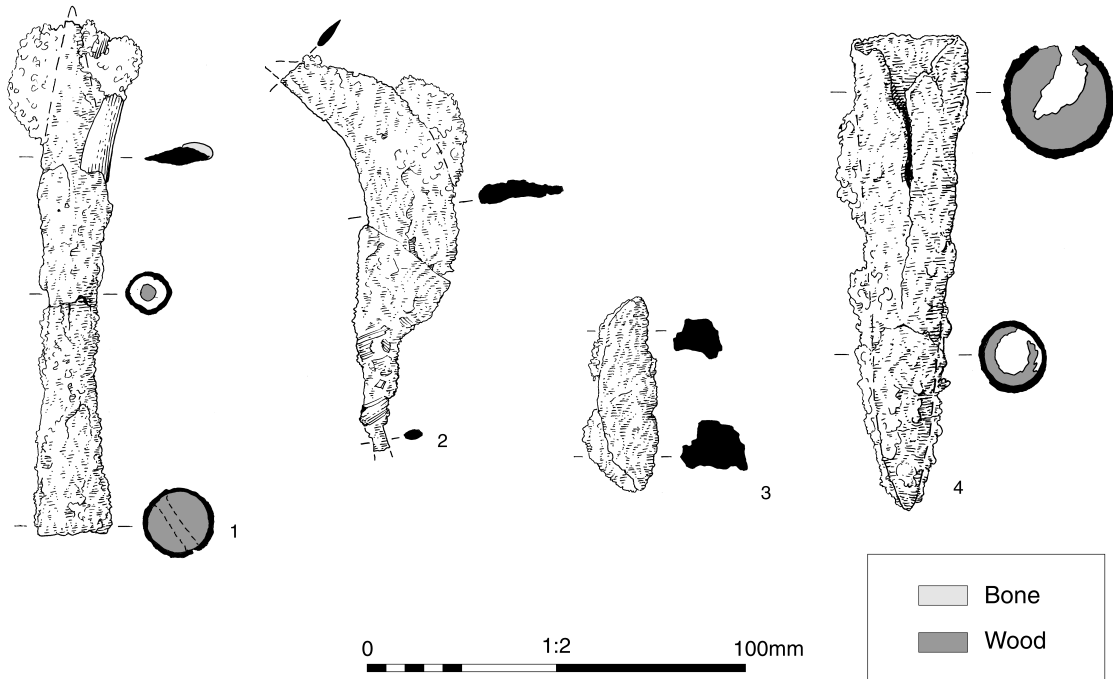


Fig 9 Selected iron objects, 1–3 from cist [9253], 4 from pit [1158], pit group A in Area 1. 1: small-bladed spearhead with conical socket (only the base of the blade remains). 2: curved, bladed tool with tang, probable knife. 3: bar (unidentifiable object). 4: ferrule with rivet hole (possible spear butt). (For full descriptions see G Jones 2020b.)

137 sherds (4375g) of Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery (Fig 10, **P13–21**), the largest such assemblage yet retrieved from a single feature within the south west. Amongst these was a small stamped jar or bowl sherd which Henrietta Quinnell considers to be a precursor to the South Western Decorated ware tradition, datable to around the fourth century BC. These sherds are described in full below and are illustrated on Figure 10.

## Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery from grave [9129]

*Grace Jones and Henrietta Quinnell*

Three fills of possible grave [9129] (fills 9130, 9131 and 9132) produced cross-joining sherds of Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery. The fabric is all gabbroic, predominantly Standard gabbroic (GA1), but also some Well-made gabbroic (GA2) and two sherds of Gabbroic fabric with mudstone

or slate inclusions (GA7) (G Jones 2020a, table 5). Twelve vessels were identified, 11 (including **P13–P20**) in the Plain Jar Group tradition of the Early Iron Age (c sixth to fourth centuries BC), with a unique stamped, necked bowl or small jar (**P21**).

The complete profile of vessel **P13** was reconstructed, revealing a jar with concave neck, carinated shoulder and plain, flat base. The scar from a handle or lug is present immediately below the carination. The external surface appears to be quite smooth in the areas where it is least abraded. Traces of burnt residue on the internal surface of the vessel suggest it was used to cook food. Two pairs of post-firing perforations had been drilled through the lower wall of the vessel, and a cord passed through them, presumably to repair the vessel. Although nothing survives of the cord itself, it had worn a groove between the holes.

**P14** is the same form as **P13**, with rounded, flared rim, concave neck, sharply carinated shoulder with countersunk-lug handle immediately below. Possible black paint was noted on the external

surface of the vessel; burnt residue is present on the internal surface. Although very similar, **P13** and **P14** do appear to represent separate pots. **P15** is also of this type but larger and thicker-walled. A black paint adheres to the upper external surface of the rim.

Sherds from a further four vessels in this tradition (not illustrated) are characterised by flared, rounded rims and concave necks; all are broken at the shoulder but the vessels were presumably carinated at this point. The rim diameters of only two are measurable, at 120mm and 200mm; the walls of each are 6–8mm thick. Two of these vessels are particularly abraded.

Two vessels have similar rounded, flared rims, concave necks and carinated shoulders, but appear to be more open in profile and are probably bowls. **P16** is of this type and has burnished internal and external surfaces. **P17** is similar but smaller, with a flared, rounded rim, concave neck and carinated shoulder. Open, carinated forms have also been recorded from Trevelgue Head, Newquay (Quinnell 2011a, fig 7.5, 27).

Two vessels are represented by their decorated carinated shoulder sherds. **P18** has three irregular tooled horizontal lines above the shoulder. Burnt residue present on the interior and patches of soot on the exterior suggest that this vessel was used for cooking. **P19** has very smooth, probably once burnished, surfaces, with tooled horizontal and diagonal lines just above the shoulder.

The central part of a base (**P20**), found in fill (9131), is decorated with incised lines, irregularly applied in the form of a cross, on its external surface. It may have derived from one of the vessels already described or another vessel.

Two shouldered body sherds, one each from the western terminal of ditch 7 and the topsoil, may also derive from vessels in the Plain Jar tradition.

The Plain Jar Group was first identified and dated to the Early Iron Age (sixth to fourth centuries BC) in the publication of the assemblage from Trevelgue Head, Newquay (Quinnell 2011a, JB2.4, fig 7.4, 74). Parallels were noted from Bodrifty, Madron (Dudley 1956, fig 9, 8), Carn Euny, Sancreed (Elsdon 1978, fig 54, 3, form Po.2), Halligye fogou, Mawgan-in-Meneage (Elsdon and Quinnell 2009–2010, fig 3, P1; fig 6, P18–19; fig 8; fig 14, P98), Boden Vean, St Anthony-in-Meneage (Quinnell 2013, fig 25, 7 and 11, fig 26, 10, 12–14) and Gurnard's Head, Zennor (Patchett and Gordon 1940, fig 8, 2). Although some vessels in the Plain

Jar Group are handled (Boden Vean: Quinnell 2013, fig 25, 9, fig 27, 17; Trenowah, St Austell: Quinnell with Taylor 2008, fig 27, 11; and Trevelgue Head: Quinnell 2011a), none are directly comparable to the handles on nos 13 and 14 from Nansloe Farm.

A small necked jar or bowl (**P21**) with an out-turned, rounded rim and rounded body was also recovered from grave [9129], in association with the Plain Jar Group vessels. The area below the neck is decorated with three tooled lines, each 1mm thick, and then a band of stamped triangles, defined above and below with two tooled lines, 3mm apart. They are isosceles triangles but appear slightly variable in size, presumably due to application to a curved surface; each is approximately 7.2mm wide and 9.2mm long. A second band of triangles below is suggested by the presence of one stamp under the lower horizontal bands. The visual effect of the two rows of stamps is of close-set chevrons in relief. The vessel is in a well-made gabbroic fabric (GA2), the surfaces are oxidised to a pale yellowish-brown (10YR 5/6), the core is predominantly oxidised with some unoxidised areas. The external surface is spalled indicating that this may be a firing failure. A body sherd with similar triangular stamps was found at Trevelgue Head with the stamps again located at the widest point of the vessel, but on the Trevelgue vessel the lines within the triangles are vertical, compared to the horizontal lines in the Nansloe stamps (Quinnell 2011, fig 7.10, 131). Quinnell also notes similar triangular stamps on a vessel from Porthmeor (Zennor), placed below dot and circle stamps (Hirst 1937, in Quinnell 2011a, 178). The Trevelgue report contains a full discussion of stamps on Iron Age Cornish pottery, updating that of Elsdon (1978). The Nansloe Farm vessel is smaller than most South Western Decorated vessels, with data published from Trevelgue Head indicating the smallest internal neck diameters of 81–100mm, compared with the 60mm internal neck diameter of the Nansloe vessel, which highlights the unique aspects of the suggested transitional **P21**. The presence of **P21** with stamped decoration in association with forms of the Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group suggests that the group as a whole comes at the end of the use of this ceramic style, probably in the fourth century BC.

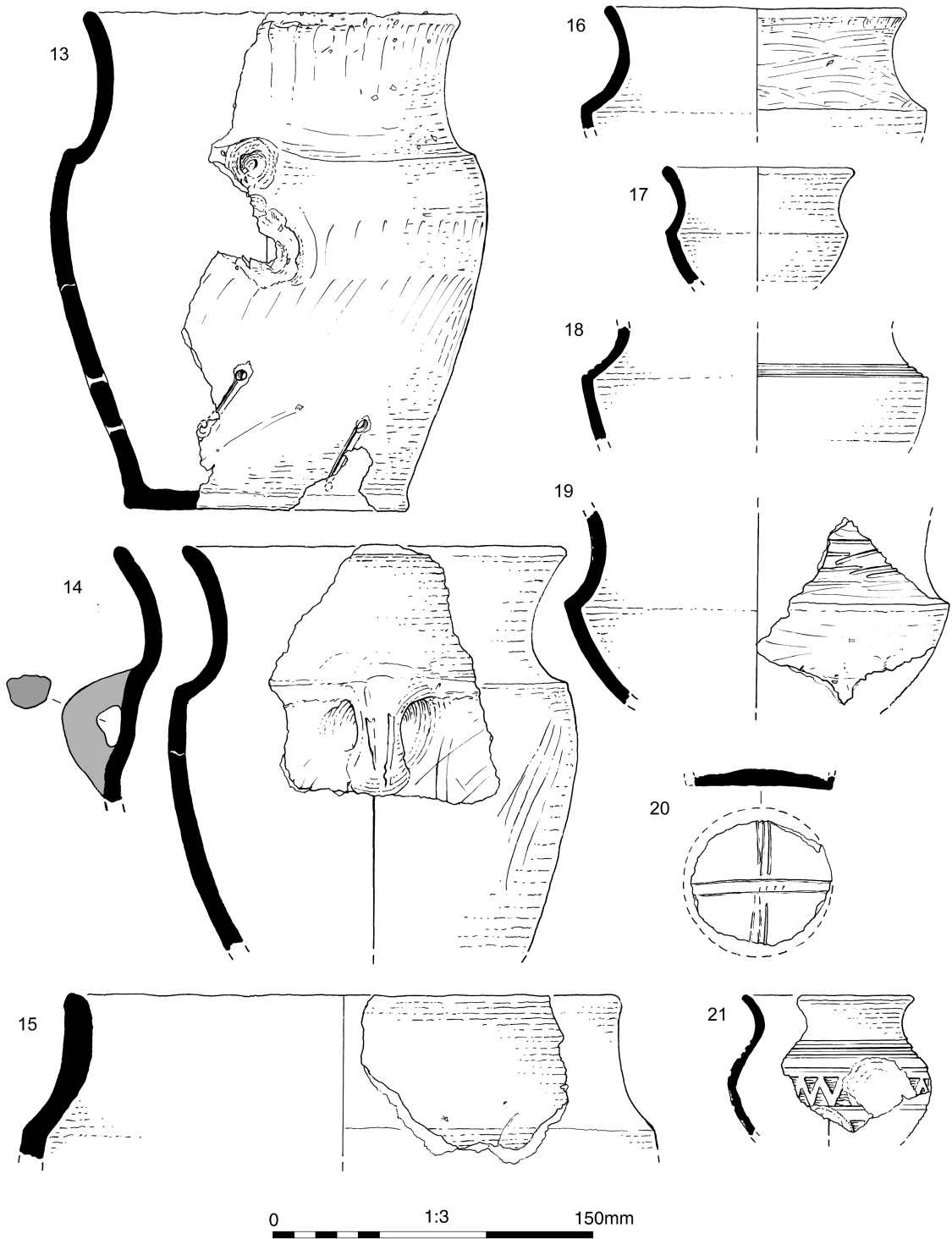


Fig 10 Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery from grave [9129].

**Illustrated pottery from grave [9129]** (Fig 10)

- P13** Plain Jar, handled, rim diameter 190mm, two pairs of post-firing repair holes, fabric GA1, height 250mm, base diameter 140mm, wall thickness 8–9mm. Early Iron Age, fills (9130), (9131) and (9132).
- P14** Plain Jar, rim diameter 190mm, with countersunk handle (22mm with an opening of 23mm on one side and 18mm on the other), fabric GA1, possible black paint on external surface, burnt residue on interior, wall thickness 8–9mm. Early Iron Age, fills (9130), (9131) and (9132).
- P15** Plain Jar, rim diameter 270mm, fabric GA1, black paint on external surface, wall thickness 10–13mm. Early Iron Age, fill (9131).
- P16** Carinated bowl with flared rim and concave neck, rim diameter 150mm, fabric GA7, wall thickness 6mm. Early Iron Age, fill (9131).
- P17** Carinated bowl with flared rim and concave neck, rim diameter 90mm, fabric GA1, walls 5–8mm thick. Early Iron Age, fill (9132).
- P18** Carinated body sherd with tooled horizontal lines, fabric GA1, burnt residue on interior, patches of soot on exterior, wall thickness 6mm. Early Iron Age, fill (9132).
- P19** Carinated body sherd with smoothed surfaces and tooled horizontal and diagonal lines, fabric GA2, wall thickness 5–7mm. Early Iron Age, fill (9132).
- P20** Base, decorated with incised lines, fabric GA2, 4–7mm thick. Early Iron Age, fill (9131).
- P21** Small jar or bowl, rim diameter 80mm, decorated with stamped triangles and tooled horizontal lines, fabric GA2, height greater than 63mm, walls 5mm thick. Early Iron Age, fills (9130) and (9133) in grave [9129], and the topsoil.

## Discussion

The excavation confirmed the results of the geophysical survey and field evaluation, that the remains of an Iron Age field system lay within the site. The excavation also uncovered Iron Age settlement and burial remains, including a notable group of iron objects and the largest assemblage of Early Iron Age Plain Jar Group pottery yet retrieved from a single feature within the south west. Settlement remains of the Early Neolithic, Beaker and Middle and Late Bronze Age periods were also

revealed, indicating that this west Cornish site has seen occupation, albeit intermittently, across some four millennia. Roman and later occupation was not evidenced.

### Early Neolithic to Beaker period (4000–1800 BC)

Although several of the recovered flints may be Mesolithic in date, no definitively Mesolithic items were recorded and these flints more probably date to the Early Neolithic period, given the presence of pits of that date. The tool types present are those used for plant and hide processing and, along with the debitage produced by knapping, reflect occupation.

Structure A in Area 1 was close to Iron Age features but was undated and, if not Iron Age, could potentially belong to the tradition of square or rectangular Early Neolithic buildings known from the British Isles. An Early Neolithic rectangular structure revealed at Penhale, St Enoder (Nowakowski *et al* 2015, 23), is the only definite example known to date in Cornwall, but was significantly larger than the structure at Nansloe Farm, being at least 25m long and 7m wide. However, smaller rectangular or square structures, more comparable to that at Nansloe Farm, are being revealed occasionally but in increasing numbers as a result of development-led archaeology in other parts of Britain and Ireland (Darvill and Thomas 1996; Smyth 2014); three possible examples were found along the South Wales Natural Gas Pipeline (Darvill 2020), while in the south west there are examples known from earlier excavations at Haldon in Devon (Willock 1936) and Chew Park, Somerset (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977). In Cornwall, ill-defined rectilinear structures have been excavated at the tor enclosures of Carn Brea and Helman Tor (Mercer 1981; 1997).

The Early Neolithic pits are another feature type being recorded in Britain in increasing numbers by development-led archaeology, including in the south-west peninsula (for example, as listed for Cornwall by Jones *et al* 2015, 160–3). The nearest examples to Higher Nansloe are a pair of Early Neolithic pits found at Tremough, Penryn (Jones *et al* 2015, 17; Jones and Gossip 2007), and two further small examples discovered at Bickland, Falmouth (Hart and Tapply 2020 [this volume]). These small pits with variable morphologies, sometimes with handfuls of a range of domestic

debris, seem to reflect episodic occupation. Current interpretations (Carver 2012, 111; Thomas 2012, 2; Jones and Quinnell 2011) have them as specially dug to receive token handfuls of waste to commemorate the end phases of occupation by communities who would have moved periodically to new locations within what was still a largely wooded environment. Although to the south of the site much of the Lizard peninsula may have been open grassland used for grazing (Dudley 2011, 29), this model may still hold true for the pits at Nansloe Farm. Although the overall duration of this seemingly episodic occupation within the site is unknown, similar pits are found in Cornwall in the Middle Neolithic (Jones 2017, table 3) and in the Late Neolithic (for example, at Penryn College and Tremough: Gossip and Jones 2017, 4, 38–9; Jones and Gossip 2007), while the presence of the Beaker period pit [1019] suggests a possible continuation within the site into the mid-third – late second millennium BC.

Pits containing fragments of Beakers, presumably indicating settlement activity, are a relatively frequent find in Cornwall, more so than Beaker-associated burial sites (for example, Jones and Quinnell 2006; 2011, 208–10; Quinnell 2014a; Jones 2019). The few Beaker sherds from this pit are of note in being ornamented with shell-impressed decoration, a feature not previously recorded in the region and perhaps deriving from Neolithic traditions along the western coast of Scotland (see CA 2020 for further details).

### **Middle Bronze Age (1500–1100 BC)**

Roundhouses 1 and 2 are in a form that can now be recognised as belonging to a tradition of vernacular architecture characteristic for the Middle Bronze Age within lowland Cornwall. Jones and Quinnell (2014), discussing a roundhouse found at Trevalga in north Cornwall, present a distribution map of examples known up to 2014 which comprised 13 different sites, the nearest to Helston being at Boden Vean, St Anthony-in-Meneage (Gossip 2013). To these can be added an example found along the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor (Jones 2019), another at Tregunnel, Newquay (Brindle, in preparation), a house at Tremough (Jones *et al* 2015) and the examples at Higher Nansloe Farm. The basic form of these seems to comprise a circular or oval hollow cut into the substrate, its internal face lined with a low wall surrounding

a post-ring, with entrances usually to the south east and sometimes aggrandised by larger posts or a porch. At Trethellan Farm (Newquay) the houses were up to 9.5m in diameter (Nowakowski 1991), while those along the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor and at Scarcewater (St Stephen-in-Brannel), were 10m and up to 12m in diameter respectively (Jones 2019; Jones and Taylor 2010).

Nansloe Farm roundhouse 1, at 7.5m in diameter, is therefore a relatively small example, with roundhouse 2, 5.5m wide at most, being smaller again. In other respects however, the Nansloe roundhouses conform to this wider Cornish architectural tradition, each comprising a hollow lined with stone walls and with an inner post-ring; the locations of their entrances are unknown. The posts within the post-rings would have been uprights, taking the weight of conical roofs, thatched or covered with sods. The stone walling may have risen to meet the roof, or might have been dwarf walls supporting wattle and daub above. No flooring survived in either roundhouse, although there were probable central hearths (open fires) or ovens (presumed to have had clay superstructures for baking). Flooring within the roundhouse found along the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor was of redeposited shillet, but hay, bracken or beaten earth might equally have been used at Nansloe Farm. An unusual feature of the Nansloe roundhouses is that the stratigraphic evidence suggested that they were contemporary, rather than sequential, with a short sunken corridor linking the two. It is interesting to note that this corridor was very narrow, but whether this relates to a need for privacy, to screen activities, or to restrict movement, is not known.

The absence of floor surfaces and occupation deposits means that little can be said about the functions and durations of roundhouses 1 and 2, or the uses of the spaces within them. Each seems to have had a central hearth or oven, while some of the internal postholes might relate to internal fittings for furniture or screens. Layers probably derived from the hearths or ovens in each roundhouse produced fuelwood charcoal and a few charred cereals, but these could as easily reflect a final closure firing as everyday use. The size difference between the two roundhouses lends itself to various interpretations. One might have been a living space, the other a work and / or cooking area; alternatively, the larger roundhouse perhaps housed the core of a family, with the smaller roundhouse providing accommodation for

subordinate members such as elderly relatives, a newly married couple or, conceivably, slaves. The small size of roundhouse 2 makes it unlikely that it was used as a byre, particularly given the presence of the hearth-oven, but this cannot be ruled out, and multiple uses over time are possible.

There is evidence for cereal cultivation at the site, in the form of charred grains, but in common with other sites of this period in Cornwall the quantities are small, perhaps suggesting an emphasis on a pastoral economy. As at Trethellan and Tremough, the principal crop appears to have been barley, although there was also wheat (Straker 1991; Carruthers 2007). No traces were found of any fields in the vicinity of the roundhouses, but the limited evidence suggests that field boundaries in Cornwall were not normally ditched at this time (Jones and Quinnell 2011, 220–1).

The large posthole [9074], 20m south west of the roundhouses, is of uncertain function since it is not clear whether it formed part of a wider structure or held an isolated post. The size of the packing stones in relation to the posthole suggests that it supported a post some 0.25m in diameter, and one possibility is that this was a totem or marker pole. A line extending from the intersection between the two roundhouses south westwards across this posthole points towards the Carminowe Creek, although this is not itself visible from the site. The use of monuments to reference natural landscape features is attested in west Cornwall for later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial and ritual monuments such as barrows and stone rows (Dudley 2011, 29–30), and it is possible that similar practices were undertaken on other site types, including at Nansloe Farm. This part of the Cornish landscape at this time was largely open (*ibid*, 31), and although the sea itself could not have been seen from eye level, the top of the post might have been visible from the sea or beach, especially if augmented in some way.

The duration of the Middle Bronze Age settlement at Higher Nansloe Farm is uncertain. There was no evidence for rebuilding, but this might reflect the durable nature of the stone walls. Both roundhouses showed evidence for deliberate demolition. Disturbed packing stones in the postholes suggest that the upright posts were removed, while the walls seem to have been slighted and the hearths or ovens scoured out and levelled. The remaining hollows were backfilled with deposits which produced a possible slate

vessel lid, a relatively large assemblage of pottery, a stone saddle quern or grinding slab, half of a large stone used as a grain rubber, and a few charred plant remains. While these could be seen simply as domestic waste deposits, the deliberate demolition of Cornish sunken-floored roundhouses seems to have been a widespread practice, identified, for example, at Trethellan Farm (Nowakowski 1991) and Tremough (Jones *et al* 2015). The house found on the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor did not seem to have been dismantled in this way, but it had been memorialised by means of a mound raised above the infilled hollow, a practice that was also seen for Late Iron Age and Roman structures on the same site (Jones 2019, 94, 132–133). In this light, the dismantling and levelling of the Nansloe Farm roundhouses is perhaps best seen as having been part of a formalised process of abandonment.

The post within large posthole [9074] to the south west of the roundhouses also seems to have been intentionally removed. A single rim sherd from a pottery vessel within the backfill of the resulting void may have been deliberately placed as a closure deposit. This perhaps bookends with the rim sherd found within pit [9033] cut into a tree-throw hole: while the relative phasing of these features is unknown, it is tempting to see pit [9033] as a foundation deposit for the settlement, undertaken following tree felling, conceivably for structural timbers for the roundhouses, with the burial of the rim sherd within posthole [9074] one of the final acts to have been undertaken.

The motives behind the abandonment of this settlement and the apparently deliberate dismantling of the two roundhouses are something that the archaeological record cannot tell us. There may have been economic or political factors at play, a calamitous event such as a death in the household, or the nature of the activities undertaken may have been a factor, perhaps having been understood by the inhabitants to have had a lifetime which had come to an end.

### **Late Bronze Age (1100–700 BC)**

Some time after the Middle Bronze Age settlement was dismantled, the site was reoccupied by inhabitants using a later Bronze Age variant of Trevisker ware, thought to date to the eleventh or tenth century BC. This pottery overlaps in date with a style termed Late Bronze Age Plain Ware, found on other sites in Cornwall, but the relationship

between the two traditions is uncertain (Quinnell 2011c, 231–3).

Whether or not there was a significant temporal gap between the settlements at Higher Nansloe is unknown, as is the relationship, if any, between these two groups of people. The form and extent of the Late Bronze Age settlement are uncertain, given that the remains were found close to the excavation edge, and their wider context is therefore unclear. At face value, they comprise a cluster of pits and postholes with a shallow ditch to the south, but it is possible that the pits and postholes represent the remains of a circular structure (structure B) at least 6.5m in diameter, with the ditch having been part of an enclosure. An enclosure at Rodway, Somerset was 38m by 24m in extent and contained two such roundhouses, although of Middle Bronze Age date (Hart and Mudd 2018, 10–13), while at Scarcewater Tip (St Stephen-in-Brannel), a Middle Bronze Age roundhouse settlement was succeeded by a Late Bronze Age roundhouse within an ovoid palisade enclosure, associated with Late Bronze Age Plain Ware and with radiocarbon dates within the late twelfth to tenth centuries cal BC (Jones and Taylor 2013, 118–21). These small enclosures, with the roundhouses themselves often poorly defined, seem to have been fairly well distributed across southern Britain, with other examples including, *inter alia*, Thorny Down, Wiltshire (Ellison 1987), Down Farm, Dorset (Barrett *et al* 1991), and Black Patch, East Sussex (Drewett 1982). Jones and Taylor (2013, 118) suggest that Late Bronze Age lowland settlement in Cornwall may be more widespread than is currently understood, with the form of such settlements making them more difficult to recognise than those of the preceding Middle Bronze Age. At Nansloe Farm, no further extent of the possible enclosure ditch is apparent on the geophysical survey plot (Fig 2), but this may simply reflect the shallow depth of the surviving ditch, with the remainder having been truncated, and the enclosure perhaps originally defined more by a bank than a ditch.

### Early to Middle Iron Age (600–100 BC)

The dating evidence provided by the ceramics is not sufficiently refined to indicate whether or not there was a temporal gap between the end of the later Bronze Age settlement and the creation of the field system during the Early to Middle Iron Age. The pottery from the Iron Age features included

both Early and Middle Iron Age material while the radiocarbon dates span the Middle to Late Iron Age and perhaps point to some later Iron Age activity, although given the absence of Late Iron Age pottery, overall dating within the Early to Middle Iron Age seems most likely.

The function of the fields is reflected in their layout, which includes trackways and corner entrances, including distinctive funnel-like ditch arrangements. Corner entrances and funnel-shaped ditch layouts are indicators of livestock management (Pryor 1999), with animals being easiest to drive through gaps located at field corners; ditch 4 in Area 1 would have allowed livestock being driven into the field to be sorted and divided, for example during lambing, or, if the fields were held in common (Dudley 2011, 33), to count or separate livestock belonging to different owners as they were driven in from summer grazing.

In response to a need to keep the farming system sustainable, a reorganisation of the landscape around the turn of the first millennium BC is suggested for west Cornwall where, as on Dartmoor, earlier systems of large coaxial fields were replaced by smaller rectangular enclosures associated with nucleated hamlets (Dudley 2011, 32–3; Herring 2008, 87–90). These new fields would have included arable and hay fields; livestock would have had winter grazing there too, at which time they would have added manure, but they would have been sent to upland pastures during the summer (Dudley 2011, 33–4; Herring 2008, 90). It is within this context that the fields and trackways at Nansloe Farm must be seen, and the area around Helston could have provided suitable summer grazing: just to the south east of Nansloe there is a stretch of higher ground formerly known as Helston Downs (now Culdrose Airfield). What livestock were farmed at Nansloe Farm is not apparent from the archaeological evidence, but Dudley (2011, 34) lists cattle, sheep and goat as the main domesticates of this period in west Cornwall. The crops grown are suggested by the range of charred plant remains from the site, these including barley together with emmer and spelt wheat.

No certain houses were identified in association with the Iron Age remains, and the possibility that structure A was Neolithic has been raised above. However, rectilinear Iron Age buildings are attested on a range of other sites, although a recent comparanda of this corpus is lacking and

debate remains about their functions, for which a range of possibilities including dwellings, communal or ritual spaces, or working areas has been suggested; the most recent meta study of such structures was undertaken by Moore who suggested that many may have been dwellings (Moore 2003, 55). A recently excavated example at Kingston Farm, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, comprised a rectangular structure 7m long and 3.15m wide, based on a ground plan of two cells either side of a corridor (Hart and McSloy 2018); a similar structure at Cleavelands, Bishop's Cleeve, Gloucestershire, was 12.9m long and 5m wide with a similar ground plan (Hart *et al*, forthcoming). The example at Nansloe Farm, if it was a building, was on a square plan (although further postholes from a more rectangular structure may have been lost) measuring 4.5m by 4.5m with a north west-facing entrance.

Pit group A seems to have been associated with heating processes and, in the absence of industrial residues, food preparation may be indicated, perhaps undertaken away from the immediate vicinity of houses in order to reduce the risk of fire. Use for food cooking relating to communal feasting was suggested for Iron Age pits associated with burning found along the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor (Jones 2019, 103). Although no deposits specifically identifiable as feasting remains were found at Nansloe Farm, it is conceivable that these pits reflect feasting associated with seasonal events, such as bringing in livestock at the end of the summer grazing season.

There was at least one high status individual at the Nansloe Farm settlement, this indicated by the grave group, particularly the cist containing the weaponry. Unfortunately, in the absence of identifiable bone within the graves, details of the individuals buried are not known. Iron Age cist graves are well attested in the south west, with most known examples being in coastal areas (Jones and Quinnell 2014, 149–50). For the few examples where bone survived, crouched inhumation seems to have been the dominant burial practice and a few have been accompanied by grave goods such as pottery, brooches and quartz pebbles (*ibid*, 150). Indeed, possible grave [9129] contained fragments of copper wire, possibly from a brooch spring, along with the pottery. Despite the numbers of Iron Age graves recorded in the south west, few individual burial sites of this date have been found within Cornwall itself, and of these only the later

Iron Age graves at Trethellan (Nowakowski 1991) and those of the Early Iron Age at Forrabury (Jones and Lawson-Jones 2014, 38–50) have been investigated using modern archaeological methodologies.

Possible grave [9129] is of note in having yielded a large assemblage of Plain Jar Group pottery. Grave 1 at Forrabury was also associated with Early Iron Age pottery, albeit in smaller quantities (Quinnell 2014b, 51). Cist [9253] is remarkable for its three iron objects, including a spearhead, as well as a rubbing stone and charred cereal grains. The discovery of a grave accompanied by weaponry is extremely rare for the region, with the nearest known weapon burial of this period being from the Isles of Scilly (Johns 2002–3). The grave goods can be seen as signifying how the individual within this grave was seen by those performing the burial rite. The weaponry would suggest status and power but possibly also a role as protector, while the rubbing stone might reflect the domestic sphere and the ability to provide food. The charred cereals are typical of a domestic assemblage but in this context possibly represent the remains of foodstuffs burnt to accompany the dead, although this is uncertain as they included weed seeds as well as grains. The stone used to construct the cists was locally collected and included slate, and quartz and granite blocks. The use of quartz is of note since this mineral seems to have been regarded throughout prehistory and beyond as having been endowed with magical qualities, both because of its colours and translucent 'otherness', and because quartz is triboluminescent, generating light when fractured or rubbed together, which resonates with funerary and ritual practices (Jones and Quinnell 2014, 151). It was also used in graves at Harlyn Bay (Jones and Mikulski 2015, 153) and Trethellan (Nowakowski 1991). At Nansloe Farm, cist grave [9253] was seemingly elaborated by having been enclosed within a small enclosure or structure, this suggested by the surrounding postholes. A few pits in its immediate vicinity, some within the structure, conceivably point to further visits to this grave, perhaps commemorating the deceased, although this cannot be demonstrated by the archaeology.

Of note is the fact that a maximum of three graves were identified. A few larger Iron Age cemeteries are recorded within Cornwall, including Forrabury (Jones and Lawson-Jones 2014), where 13 graves were recorded, Trethellan (Nowakowski 1991), which had 21 graves, and, on a far larger scale,

Harlyn Bay, which included 130 cist graves (Jordan 2019). Aside from these larger examples, the small number of graves at Nansloe Farm is entirely in keeping with Iron Age traditions across Britain, where only a few individuals received formal burial within graves, and it must be suspected that, for most settlements, the majority of the population were given funeral rites that have left little or no archaeological trace, such as disposal in wet places like bogs and rivers, or by excarnation. These largely archaeologically invisible practices were the norm for most of the population, and so those buried at Higher Nansloe Farm must be viewed as exceptions, their burial perhaps reflecting their perceived roles as protectors and providers (cf Giles 2012).

There is little evidence that the Iron Age settlement continued into the Late Iron Age. Despite the span of the two radiocarbon dates which extend as late as the first century BC, Late Iron Age Cordoned ware pottery and Roman finds were absent, and the only subsequent remains were a few medieval or later field boundaries. A Roman-period presence in the area is possibly suggested by a Roman coin supposed to have been found within Helston, but the provenance of this is uncertain and it is now lost (HER MCO 733). It is likely that occupation shifted to one of the many rounds suggested in the vicinity of Helston, but none of these has been tested by excavation.

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