An island of settlement in a sea of monuments: recent excavations at L’Erée, Guernsey

Duncan Garrow (Liverpool) & Fraser Sturt (Southampton)
Some background...
Two main research themes

1. Mesolithic-Neolithic transition
2. Contextualising monuments
The transition...
The transition...

c. 4050 BC

c. 5200 BC
The ‘Neolithic package’

- polished stone technology
- domesticated animals (cows, sheep, pigs)
- domesticated crops (barley, wheat)
- pottery
- monuments (tombs, causewayed enclosures)
- substantial settlements
The package comes apart...
Radiocarbon dating of Early Neolithic sites in UK
(Whittle, Healy & Bayliss 2011)
The transition...
Two main research themes

1. Mesolithic-Neolithic transition
2. Contextualising monuments
Contextualising monuments
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“You can’t understand a society through its tombs alone”

Toxteth cemetery, Liverpool
Contextualising monuments

Neolithic pits, Kilverstone, Norfolk (Garrow)

“You can’t understand a society through its tombs alone”
L’Erée, Guernsey
L’Erée – a brief history

Renouf & Urry 1976 – prehistoric material eroding from cliff
– monitored from then on
L’Erée – a brief history
Cunliffe’s 1998 excavations

Photograph kindly provided by John Renouf
L’Erée – a brief history
Cunliffe 1998 – early C14 dates for the Neolithic

- 5270-5060 cal BC (on bulked charcoal from ditch)
- 4230-3810 cal BC (on a hearth 55m to the east)
L’Erée – a brief history
Cunliffe 1998 – LN/EBA occupation contemporary with later use of the tomb
L’Erée – a brief history of our involvement

GPR/topography/boreholes
Spring 2008

Excavation
Summer 2008

Test pit excavation and boreholes
2009, larger areas 2010-11
Excavation, Summer 2008 – western field
Excavation, Summer 2008 – artefacts from deposits (LN/Chalcolithic/EBA)
– 500 sherds (3kg), 195 flints
Excavation, Summer 2008 – gully/post-hole feature
Excavation, Summer 2009 – sometimes very deep stratigraphy
Topography and deposit modelling
Excavation, Summer 2009 – lots of artefacts (e.g. 1805 sherds, 8.2kg of pottery)
– mostly Chalcolithic/EBA
Excavation, Summer 2009 – features

Post-hole (Tr. 6) and ditch (Tr. 7)
Excavation, Summer 2009 – features

Stone-lined/filled hearths (Tr. 11)
Excavation, Summer 2009 – C14 dates/pottery

Cérny (?) pottery (c. 4800-4400)

C14 date – 4330-4060 cal BC
Excavation, Summer 2011
L’Eree (2008-11)
L’Eree (2008-11) – features

• Post and stake-holes – temporary structures?
L’Eree (2008-11) – features

- Post and stake-holes – temporary structures?
- Hearths – camp-like visits?
L’Éree (2008-11) – features

• Post and stake-holes – temporary structures?
• Hearths – camp-like visits?
• Enigmatic ditches – enclosure?
L’Eree (2008-11) – finds/dates

- Polished stone ring fragment (VSG) c. 5000-4500 BC
- Cérny ancien (?) style pottery c. 4700-4600 BC
- Pinacle-Fouaillages style pottery c. 4600-4300 BC
- C14 on hearth 4330-4060 BC
- Lots of Early Bronze Age material (c.2500-1800 BC)
• Polished stone ring fragment (VSG) c. 5000-4500 BC (?)

• Cérny ancien (?) style pottery c. 4700-4600 BC

• Pinacle-Fouaillages style pottery c. 4600-4300 BC

• C14 on hearth 4330-4060 BC

• Lots of Early Bronze Age material (c.2500-1800 BC)

• Repeated, temporary settlement – throughout the middle and later 5th millennium

• “Occupation” during EBA
Two main research themes:
1. Contextualising monuments
2. Mesolithic-Neolithic transition
### Contextualising monuments: Earlier Neolithic

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- **L’Eree**
  - (pottery, C14 dates)
  - Hearths, etc,

- **Le Creux ès Faïes tomb**
  - (tomb typology/Beakers)
  - Construction
Contextualising monuments: Late Neolithic/EBA

Kendrick 1928

6000 BC  |  5000 BC  |  4000 BC  |  3000 BC  |  2000 BC

L’Eree  
(pottery, C14 dates)

Le Creux ès Faïes tomb  
(tomb typology/Beakers)

Hearths, etc,  |  Construction  |  Occupation layer  |  Re-use
Contextualising monuments: Earliest Neolithic

L’Éree
(pottery, C14 dates)

Les Fouaillages
(earliest tomb in Channel Islands)

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Hearths, etc,

Construction

Occupation layer

Re-use

Image from Ian Kinnes
Contextualising monuments: Earliest Neolithic

L’Eree
(pottery, C14 dates)

Les Fouaillages
(earliest tomb in Channel Islands)

Royal Hotel
(earliest settlement in Channel Islands)

Pottery from the Royal Hotel site (Sebire & Renouf 2010)
Two main research themes:

1. Contextualising monuments
2. Mesolithic-Neolithic transition
The ‘Neolithic package’ in Guernsey

• polished stone technology
• domesticated animals (cows, sheep, pigs)
• domesticated crops (barley, wheat)
• pottery
• monuments (tombs, causewayed enclosures)
• insubstantial settlements
The package comes apart...
Radiocarbon dating of Early Neolithic sites in UK (Whittle, Healy & Bayliss 2011)
The process of transition in NW France

Etape 1 (5200-5000 av. J.C.), RFBP/BVSG ancien, têtes de pont en vallée de Seine et Orne.

Etape 2 (5100-4800 av. J.C.), BVSG "classique", nouvelles têtes de pont dans la vallée de l'Orne et de La Vilaine.

Etape 3 (4900-4700 av. J.C.). A gauche, au début de cette phase, apparition à l'ouest du BVSG "cordons" (sous l'impulsion de groupes situés plus au sud -Cardial Atlantique ?-) contemporain de certains groupes du BVSG "classique" encore en place en Vallée de Seine, ce qui expliquerait la présence de céramique décorée de cordons en V au sein des assemblages céramiques (transfert de techniques décoratives). A droite, fin de la phase, le BVSG "cordons" s'étend sur une vaste surface avec souvent en association des pastilles au repoussé.

Etape 4 (4700-4600 av. J.C.), Cerny ancien, fin de la progression initiée depuis le RFBP.

Etape 5 (4600-4400/4300 av. J.C.), 2e partie du NMI, refonte après éclatement de "Unité" Cerny.
The process of transition in NW France

Indigenous adoption?  

Spread of farmers?

Marcigny et al. 2010
The process of transition in the Channel Islands

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The process of transition in the Channel Islands
The process of transition in the Channel Islands

Curnic, Brittany
The process of transition in the Channel Islands

Bliquy/VSG 'cordons'

Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image © 2011 IGN-France
The process of transition in the Channel Islands

Patton 1995
The process of transition in the Channel Islands and beyond
Stepping stones to the Neolithic?
Islands, maritime connectivity and the ‘western seaways’ of Britain, 5000-3500 BC
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