



Standing Stones & Holy Wells of Cornwall

Focus on “Ceremonial sites”

- Chamber tombs, cairns, barrows
- Stone circles, menhirs, holed stones
- Inscribed stones
- Stone crosses
- Holy wells

and not on “Settlement sites” like

- Tor enclosures e.g. Carn Brae; round houses; cliff castles; hill forts; fogous, courtyard houses of Roman era etc.

CEREMONIAL SITES

Round barrows

Stone circles & rows,
menhirs, holed stones

Henges

Chamber tombs

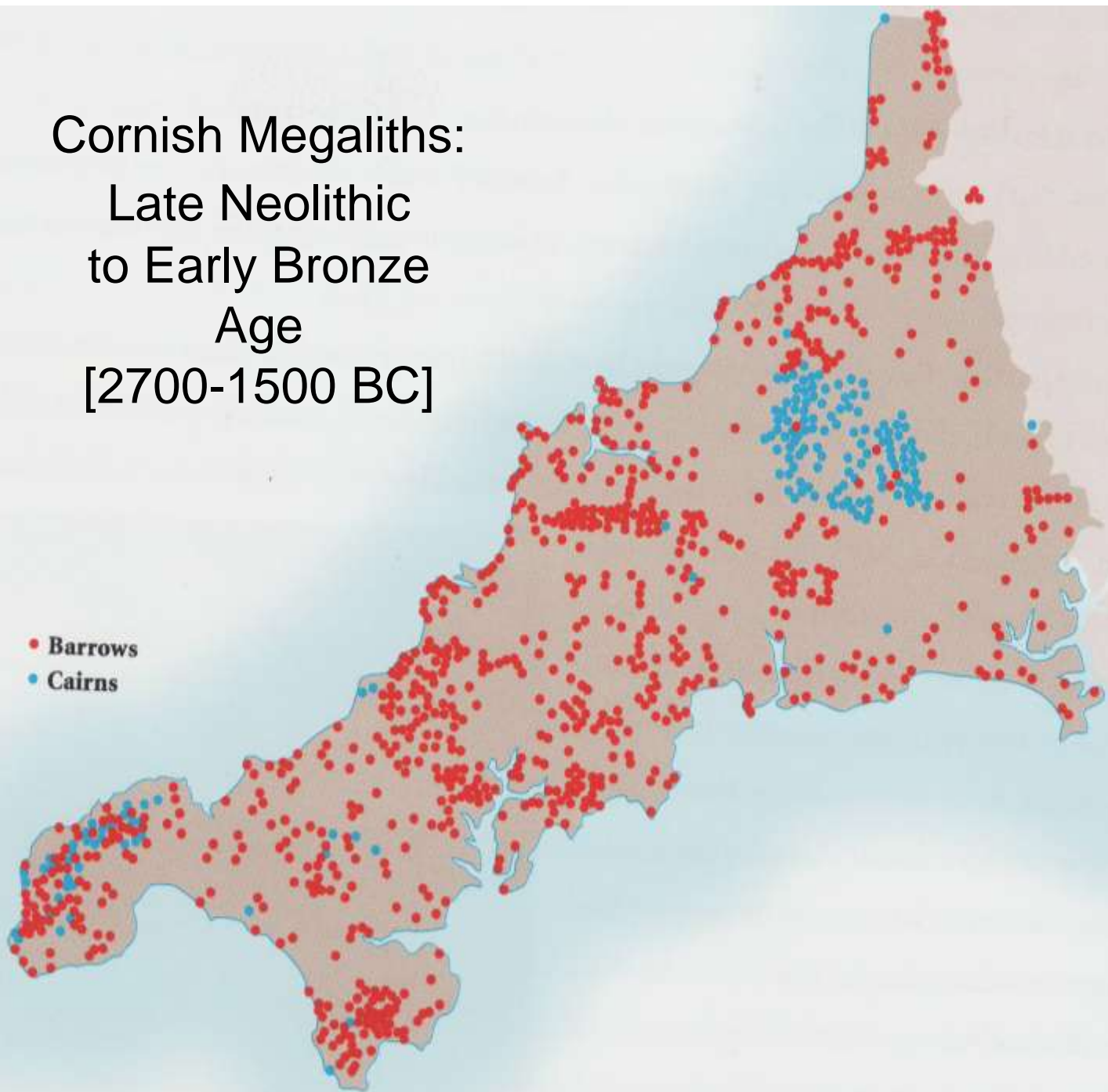
Stone crosses

Inscribed stones



Cornish Megaliths:
Late Neolithic
to Early Bronze
Age
[2700-1500 BC]

- Barrows
- Cairns



Neolithic Age: Long Barrows

Frequent in Sthn Britain, rare in Cornwall:

Woolley Barrow nth of Kilkhampton,

Brane Barrow nr Sancreed

20-120 m long wedge-shaped mounds higher at one end; dated 3,700-2,500 BC

Bronze Age: Round Barrows, 'tumuli'

common prehistoric monuments; hills, cliffs, lowlands, alone or clusters or lines; often with circles/ritual sites; succeed chambered cairns for burials c.2,500BC on; many styles –bowl most common; 4-33 m, Carne Beacon 6.5m high; central burial place, usually cremation; grave goods e.g. Rillaton Cup of sheet gold & bronze dagger; rare after 1,200 BC → Iron Age flat cemeteries

Ballowall Barrow nr St Just



Brane Barrow nr Sancreeed



Brane Barrow plan



Chamber tombs [portal dolmens, cromlechs]

Lanyon Quoit nr Madron



Trethevy Quoit nr St Cleer



Chamber tombs:

also known as “passing places”,

Quoits in Cornwall.

e.g.* Zennor Quoit

- * Pawton Quoit

- * Trethevy Quoit

- * Chun Quoit ‘closed box’

- * Lanyon Quoit [now altered]

Capstones may be 10-14 tonnes, above a chamber 3 metres high –an engineering feat !

The purpose of Quoits ?

- * tombs ? some cremated or skeletal remains found, but rare
- * exposed portals capstones suggest ceremonial approaches
- * some with stone/earth cairns & kerbs
- * many on high positions: watching over Neolithic farm fields ? territorial symbol or statement ? spiritual focus for the gods of agriculture & nature ?

Neolithic : Tregiffian Chambered Cairn [aka Entrance Grave/Scillonian chamber tomb]



- Entrance graves:
- c.24 on Lands End peninsula, 50+ in Scillies probably modelled on mainland practice
- successors to portal dolmens, drum-shaped cairns 6-12 m across, heavy granite kerb
- interior passage-chamber/s, usually c. one metre high and wide
- many are boat-shaped in plan
- enlargement & adaptation thro Bronze Age
- So far, excavations have found few human remains; “cupped stone” purpose ???

Early Bronze Age ceremonial sites: Merry Maidens Stone Circle



The Merry Maidens, Lamorna Valley nr Penzance

- Legend
- In a true circle, 23.8 m diameter
- 19 stones, 0.8-1.4 m
- East-facing gap may be ritual entrance
- Associated outlying pair of menhirs: The Pipers, 400 m NE of Merry Maidens
- Boscawen-ros & Gun Rith [The Fiddler, 3.2 m] standing stones also nearby

Merry Maidens aerial view



Boscawen-Un Stone Circle

nr St Buryan

- “Place of Elder trees on the downs”
- Early Bronze Age ellipse with diameters 24.9 & 21.9 m
- 19 stones, 0.9-1.3 m high
- West-facing gap may be ritual entrance
- Sharply leaning central stone 2.4 m, just Sth of centre, points NE
- Modern Cornish Gorsedd inaugurated here 1928

Boscawen-Un Stone Circle



Boscawen-Un central stone

John Nash artist & Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network



Menhirs – "longstones: The Pipers

400 m from the Merry Maidens: 4.6 & 4.1 m



Men An Tol holed stone, Morvah



Men An Tol [Cornish “stone of the hole”]

- Early Bronze Age, purpose unknown but presumed ritual site, once part of stone circle 17 m across, with 19-20 stones
- Site altered in long past
- Wheel-slab 1.3 m across, hole 51 cm diameter, countersunk on one side
- “Traditionally” used for healing & prediction; fertility ritual ?
- Men Scryfa 1.8 m inscribed standing stone 300 m Nth; C6th dedication [Cornish “written stone”]

Inscribed standing stone: Rialton stone, Penzance Museum



Rialton Stone

- from Rialton Barton, St Columb Minor
- C6th memorial in well established Christian community
- “In loving memory of ??? son of Tribunus”
- Mixture of Irish, British, Latin words suggests a multi-cultural society

Early Christian monuments: chi rho
late C5th e.g. Phillack Parish Church



Ireland: Muiredach's Cross [west/east faces] [also Scotland e.g. Iona]



Cornish crosses: “Medieval standing stones”

- Over 400 complete crosses, 200+ fragments
- **Wayside crosses** = majority, marked routes across farmland to parish church, C12th-14th
- **Boundary crosses** –parishes & glebe land, monastic land, church sanctuaries
- **Memorial crosses** to local king or chieftain eg. King Doniert Stone at St Cleer [cross base]
- **Village/market crosses** –few examples in C.
- **Churchyard crosses** –more elaborate exs., most C9th-C11th; memorials & preaching

Lanivet Wayside Cross



St Just crossshaft knotwork



Madron Parish Church



St Piran's Cross, Perranporth



St Piran's Old Church C12th

set in Lanpiran, the older monastic enclosure.

Piran's Cross nearby predates this church: C8th ?



St Buryan C10th-15th Church

C7th-8th Cross: Christ regnant



Ceremonial enclosure: Perran Round Rose Hamlet nr Perran Sands



Perran Round

- Earth & rubble, maybe originally Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure ?
- Best surviving example of Cornish medieval amphitheatre: Plen An Gwary
- Site of Miracle Plays for pilgrims to St Piran
- Plan 1st drawn by antiquarian William Borlase 1758
- Two opposed processional entrances Nth & Sth
- “Devil’s spoon” trench within E side of arena
- Modern Gorseth & miracle plays, Ordinalia

Holy wells: Madron chapel & Baptistry



Madron Baptistery



Madron chapel altar



Sancreed Holy Well



Clouties at Sancreed Holy Well



Chapel Euny Holy Well



Standing Stones & Holy Wells

