

WEST WIGHT ARCHAEOLOGY HERITAGE TOTLAND



Totland's archaeology heritage

The Palaeolithic Period (425,000 to 10,000 BC)

The Isle of Wight was first inhabited around 425,000 years ago in the Palaeolithic period, when its landmass was still attached to Europe and Britain.

Because this period was part of the Ice Age, there were a series of colder periods (called Glacials) when ices sheets covered the land and only animals like mammoth and woolly rhinoceros could survive.

In between these Glacial periods were warmer periods (called "Interglacials") when woodlands of hazel, oak, yew, ash and elm grew and animals such as deer, bison and horses wandered across the land, followed by early humans who hunted the animals with stone tools.

The first islanders were hunter-gatherers who visited during the warmer spells between the Ice Ages and who have left behind their worked flint tools in and around the river valleys where they followed and hunted the seasonal herds and collected nuts, plants,

fish and other foods from the heavily forested landscape.

Gravels which were laid down by the ancient rivers during the Palaeolithic period still survive within the Totland Parish today. Our Palaeolithic visitors have also left behind evidence of their hunting and seasonal camps on these river gravels.

Island people have been finding and recording the tools of our earliest visitors for many years and in 1899 S.H Warren found a handaxe and a layer of flint tools on High Down. The find was published in the Geological Magazine of 1900 and the finds are so important, they are held in the British Museum.



Palaeolithic tools from High Down

Other Palaeolithic finds were made at Totland Bay in the early 20th Century and were recorded by Hubert F Poole, a tailor and

antique dealer from Sandown, who was in his late twenties when he noticed that very little attention had been given to the Stone Ages on the Island.

Luckily for our studies today, he proceeded to record flint tools that were being hand dug from the gravel workings on the Island and recorded the Palaeolithic finds from Totland Bay in the Proceedings of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society.

These unique tools can help us to understand the evolution of Modern Humans from our earlier ancestors such as Homo Erectus or Homo Neanderthalensis (The Neanderthals).

The Mesolithic Period (10,000 to 4,500 BC)

The final separation of the Isle of Wight occurred around 10,000 years ago, during the Mesolithic period, when the Solent River was gradually drowned by sea level rise.

The tundra of the landscape gradually became colonised by birch trees until the land which was to become the Island was covered with thick deciduous woodland and herds of red deer. Because of the sea level rise associated with melting ice sheets, Britain and the Island became cut off from the rest of Europe

The Mesolithic people still lived by hunting and gathering and slowly adapted their lifestyles and flint tools to the changing environment in

which they lived. Whereas the earliest Palaeolithic humans who had visited the area had hunted herds of large Ice Age animals, the Mesolithic people had to hunt individual animals from a wider variety of species because herds were much less frequent in the thickly wooded landscapes.

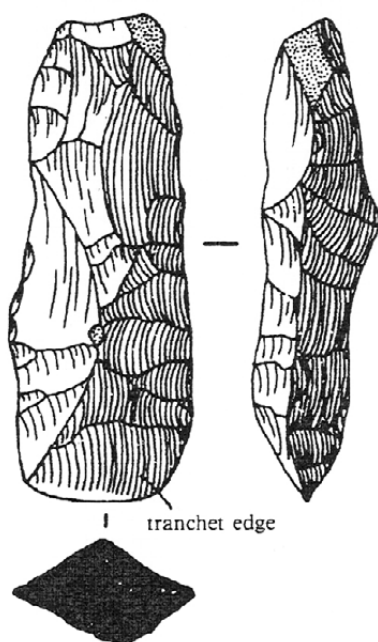
This is the first period of human history on the Island which provides us with occupation sites as well as the flint tools left behind by our prehistoric ancestors.

Mesolithic groups seem to have moved around a particular territory and stayed at seasonal camps near to rivers which provided fish and other resources. Because these camps were temporary, even if they were returned to year after year, the archaeological remains left behind are very small and very difficult to spot. The postholes from a temporary skin covered shelter are too small to be identified and it is rare for Mesolithic occupation sites to be found.

Important remains dating to the Mesolithic period, such as hearths, stone tools and environmental deposits survive in submerged river estuaries and along the south coast of the Island.

The most frequent remains of this period are, of course, the stone tools and the debris from their manufacture which have been left behind by Mesolithic communities.

A Mesolithic Tranchet axe



There are some very distinctive shapes and types of flint tools which became common in the Mesolithic period.

One of these was the "Tranchet axe" which was a heavy flint axe sharpened to a point by the removal of a single flake from the side or "tranchet".

These tools were probably hafted onto a wooden or antler haft in order to be used. One of these Tranchet axes was found near Alum Bay in 1929.

Another typical type of Mesolithic flint tool is the "microlith", a very small worked flint blade which seem to get smaller in size as the Mesolithic period progresses.

These were probably used for arrows bars and composite tools and weapons. Other types of flint tool include scrapers, burins and awls and it must be remembered that bone, antler, wood and other organic materials were used to make objects and tools, it is just very rare for them to survive as well as flint does. Although there is no evidence from the Island yet, the Mesolithic people were known to hunt red and roe deer, pig, aurochs and elk on the mainland.

The study of the Mesolithic Period can help us to understand how early humans adapted to the changing landscape brought about by climate change and sea level rise, something which is becoming more important to us in today's modern world.

The Neolithic Period

(4,500 to 2,000 BC)

Farming was introduced to the Island around 5000 years ago in the Neolithic period.

This allowed the local people to build permanent settlements for the first time and they also build huge communal funerary monuments. The beginning of the clearance of much of the ancient forest dates to this period as farming communities established new ways of growing crops and farming animals. The clearance of the forests from the landscapes continued as more settlements grew up and gradually the landscape was transformed into a network of small agricultural settlements.

Because they were now staying in one place, communities started to build large earthwork ceremonial and burial monuments which

could serve their settlements and mark out the limits of their territory. This is the period in which Stonehenge was built and one of these earliest earthwork monuments still survives on the Island today.

The Neolithic people had different burial customs to those we use today. Instead of individual graves, people were buried in large communal burial mounds called "long barrows". These were often placed at the edges of their territory on high down land or hill tops and used to be part of a much bigger landscape of ceremonial monuments and structures.



The Longstone at Mottistone

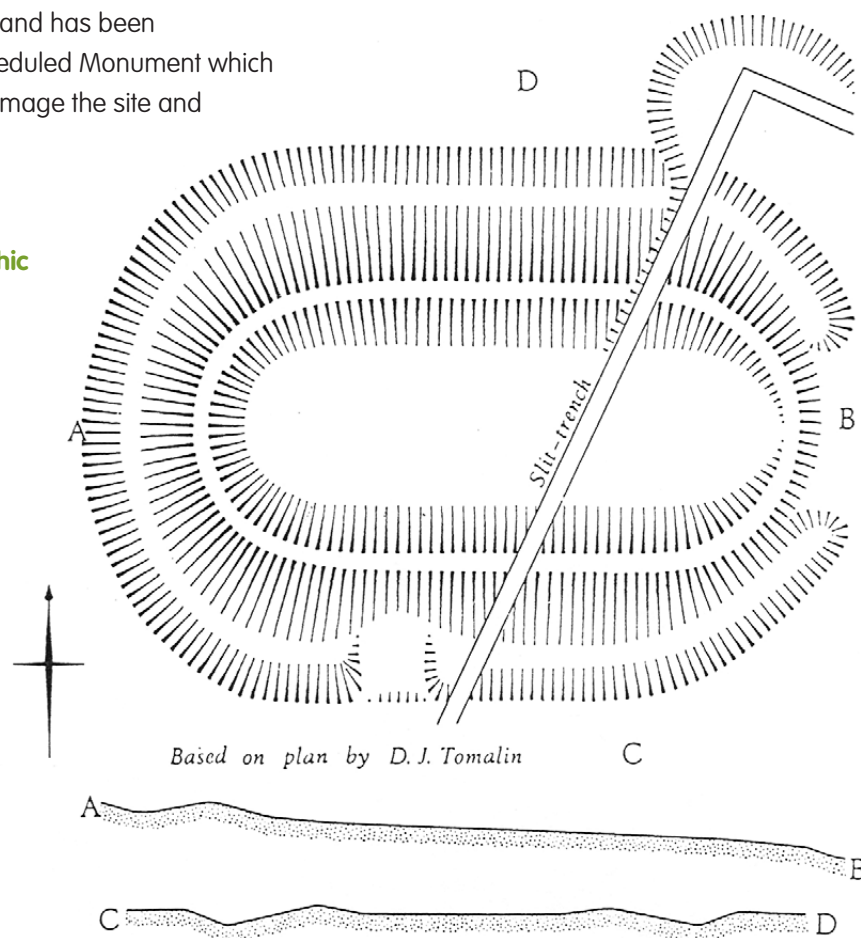
The Longstone on Mottistone Down is sometimes thought of as a standing stone as that is all that survives of the earthwork today. But it was originally one of the upright stones which formed part of a Neolithic long barrow.

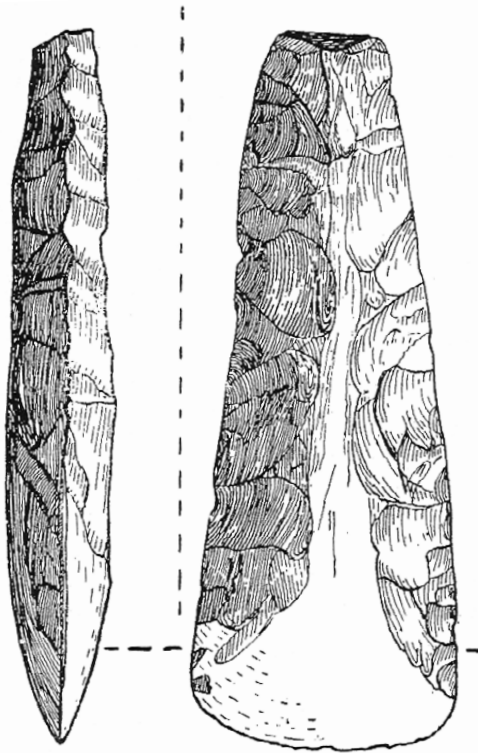
The Longstone is the name given to the two massive blocks of ferruginous sandstone from the Upper Greensand which survive on the site. To the west of the stones is a low earthen mound which is 31 metres long and 9 metres wide and less than 2 metres high today. But in Neolithic times a large mound of earth would have covered the standing stones and inside it would have been chambers in which the bones of the dead were buried. As the burial place of the first Island farmers, this site is of national importance and has been designated as a Scheduled Monument which makes it illegal to damage the site and its surroundings.

The Longstone has been a special place for many generations of Islanders and visitors and interest in its past uses have attracted archaeologists for a long time. The famous archaeologist Jaquetta Hawkes, who lived on the Island in the 1950's, did some excavations at the site in 1956 and revealed part of the ditch which had run around the mound.

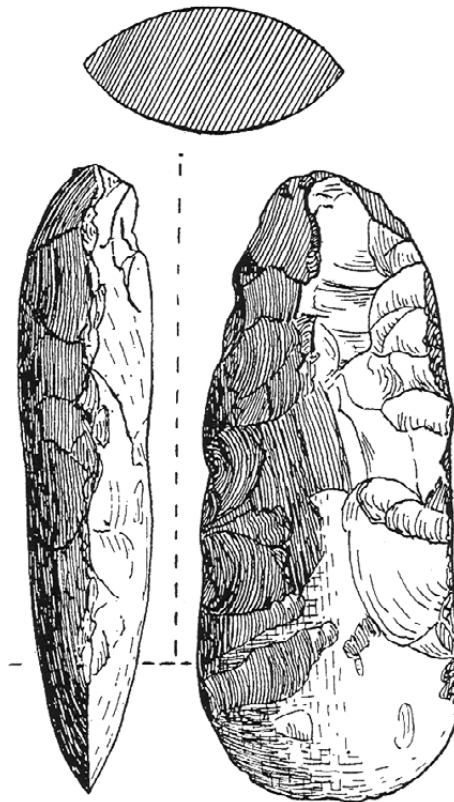
Another very important Neolithic site lies near to the Totland parish boundary with neighbouring Freshwater Parish. This is a low oval shaped mound which was first noticed in 1940. It is 36 metres long and 25 metres wide and is surrounded by a ditch and is all that remains of a Neolithic Mortuary Enclosure on Tennyson Down.

A plan of the Neolithic Mortuary Enclosure earthwork on Tennyson Down



**Neolithic axes**H.F.P.
1930

The Neolithic settlement at nearby Freshwater Bay would leave their dead exposed on a wooden platform within the Mortuary enclosure until birds and animals had picked the bone clean. The bone would then be buried in the communal burial chambers such as the one recorded on Afton Down. In 1989 a radiocarbon sample was taken from a piece of charcoal excavated from the ditch of the Tennyson Down Mortuary Enclosure and it was dated between 2865 and 2290 BC.



Flint was still used to make tools and weapons in the Neolithic period and flint axes and other tools have been found in Totland Parish. Every Neolithic farmer would have had a toolkit containing the scrapers, blades, axes and other flint tools and when they broke beyond repair they were thrown away and replaced with a new one. Neolithic axes have been found at Totland Bay and Alum Bay.

The Bronze Age

(2,500 to 700 BC)

Around 2500BC, the use of bronze was introduced to Britain and Bronze axes and weapons became so important that the period is called the Bronze Age.

The effects of Bronze Age communities interactions with the natural environment can clearly be seen today, such as the later Bronze Age construction of enormous wooden fishtraps on the beaches or the communal building of burial mound cemeteries along the Island's central chalk ridge designed to provide a ceremonial aspect to the landscape.

These individual burial mounds (or "Barrows") gradually replaced the communal burial chambers of the Neolithic period. These were round mounds built from soil taken from an

external ditch which were raised over a central burial of one person. These barrows were placed on the crests of hills and downland and could be seen from far away, probably as a show of prestige and territoriality and some still survive in Totland Parish today.

These groups of funerary monuments can be seen on a saddle between the chalk escarpments of Headon Hill and West High Down. Originally these mounds would have been a skyline feature when viewed the East and the West.



The Bronze Age Burial Mounds on Headon Warren and Tennyson Down once looked like these on Brook Down

They were probably placed there to show other Bronze Age communities where the limits of the Totland settlement's land was and to make the barrow cemetery a special place where burial ceremonies were carried out. There are also burial mounds on Headon Warren and Tennyson Down.

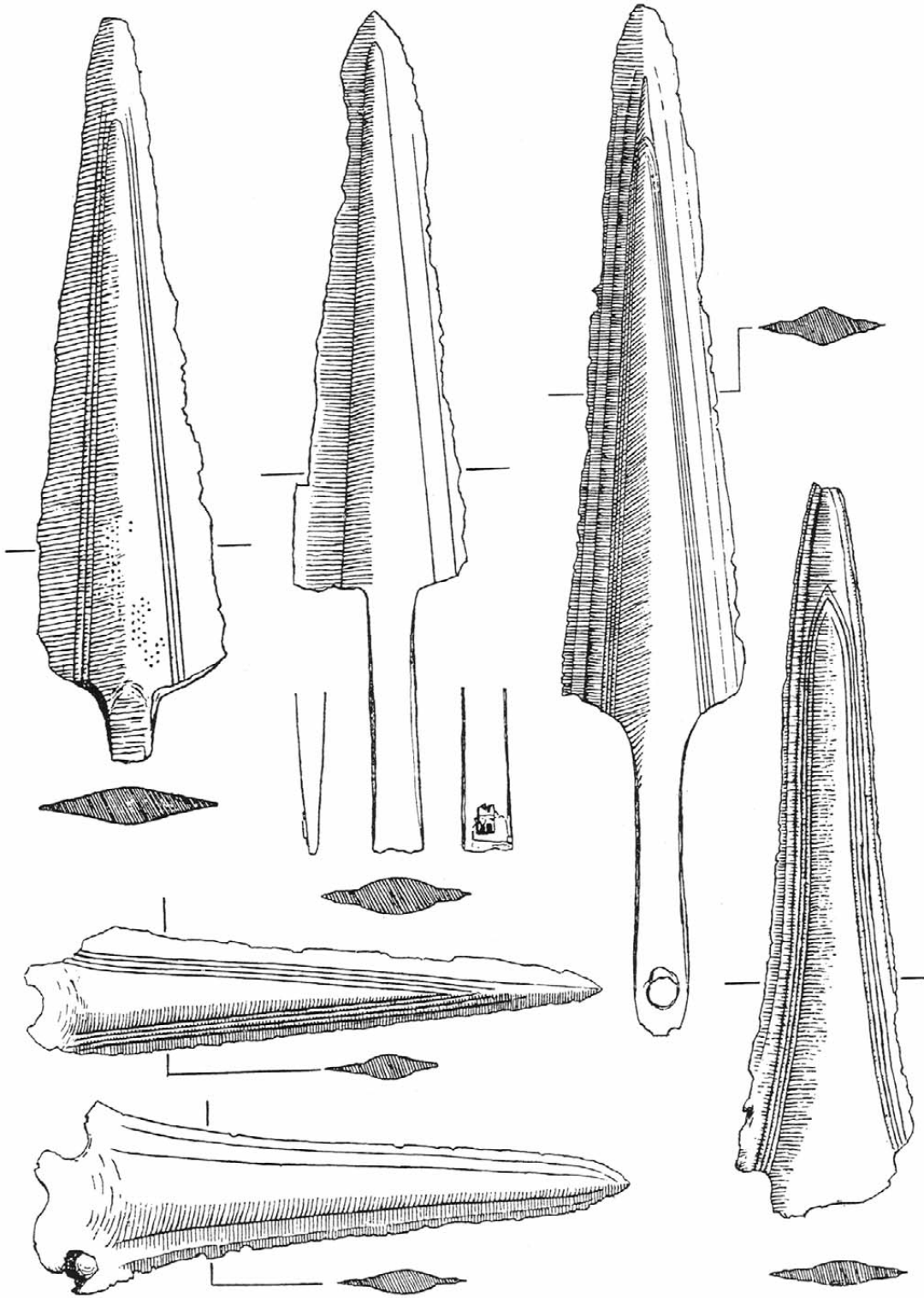
The burial mounds are protected as Scheduled Monuments so that it is illegal to damage them, to dig into them or to metal detect on them. Most were excavated by antiquarians so that little survives of the internal burial, just the mounds in our modern landscapes to show us where our prehistoric ancestors were buried.

Bronze Age burial mounds on the Island have interested antiquarians since 1237 when the optimistic Islanders were recorded as opening the barrows looking for treasure in the Close Rolls of Henry III. In the 17th Century, Sir John Oglander wrote "you may see divers buries on ye top of owre Island hills...as being places onlie weare men were buryed". Because of this interest and the activities of antiquarians

in the 19th centuries, most of the burial mounds have already been disturbed and any burials and grave goods have been removed.

The landscape of the Bronze Age would have been similar to that of the rural areas of West Wight today with agricultural field systems set out around small farmsteads with areas of woodland, pasture and wasteland. Wetlands and coastal areas were used to collect food and other resources and, standing in the modern Parish landscape today, it is not hard to imagine the Bronze Age inhabitants doing the same

Totland parish was the site of an amazing Bronze Age discovery during the 2nd World War. In 1942 a farmer noticed that his cattle were trampling down a low bank in wet weather and a hoard of Bronze Age tools and weapon heads were discovered within the bank. Three spearheads, three daggers and seven flanged axes were found and after being re-assessed in 1984 are thought by the British Museum in London to have been a ritual deposit.



Spearheads from the Moon's Hill Hoard

The Iron Age (700 BC to 43 AD)

The development from bronze to the use of iron working technology has led to the next archaeological period being known as the Iron Age.

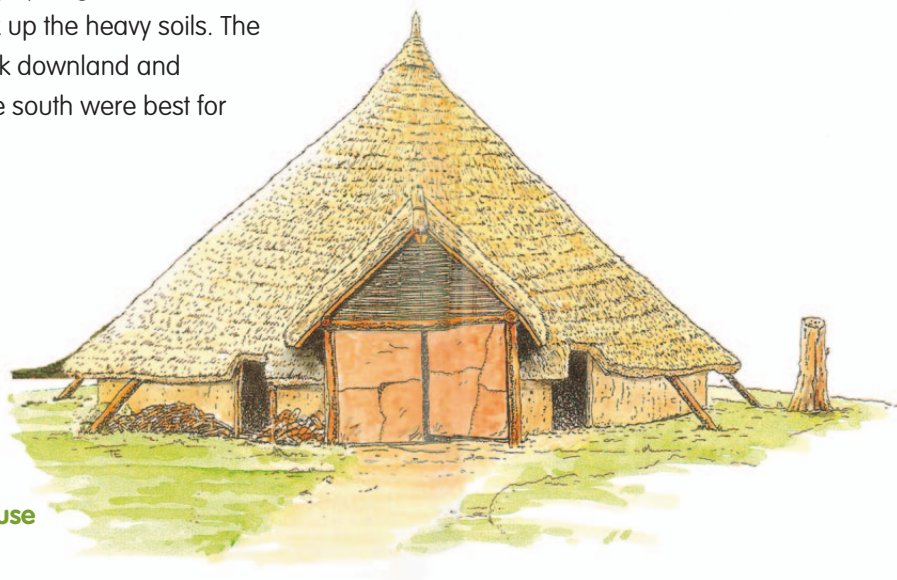
This dates from about 700 BC to the coming of the Romans. Iron Age communities farmed the Island's landscape and the remains of their field systems and enclosures still survive as earthworks. Settlement sites and imported finds show that our Iron Age tribal society took part in trade with their neighbours in mainland Britain and in Europe.

The Iron Age was the final prehistoric period before the Romans invaded Britain and the landscape would still have been made up of small farming settlements surrounded by a patchwork of fields and landscape boundaries with woodland and waste or pasture lands.

Pollen evidence from Island sites has shown that the north of the Island was probably still wooded as the Iron Age ploughs were not good enough to break up the heavy soils. The lighter soils of the chalk downland and Greensand plain in the south were best for

farming, so by the late Iron Age agriculture was a successful mix of cereal and animal farming. Most people in Iron Age society were peasant farmers, but there were also slaves and skilled craftsmen. These groups were ruled by nobles who included religious leaders and kings.

In some areas of England, these elite sections of society lived in hillforts which were protected central places for the local community. No hillforts have yet been discovered in the West Wight, but other Iron Age settlement evidence has been excavated elsewhere on the Island and it revealed the ditches, pits and postholes which were all that remained of the post built roundhouses, enclosures and structures of an Iron Age farm.



An Iron Age roundhouse

The roundhouses were built from a ring of strong upright wooden posts which slope into a peak in the centre. The walls were built up from a mixture of mud, straw and animal dung and then a thatched roof was added.

The families would have lived communally in the open space inside with certain areas set aside for sleeping, storage and every day living. The fire in the centre of the roundhouse would probably have been kept burning all day and night as the only source of heat for cooking.

It is not known what the role of the Iron Age tribes on the Island was in the pre-Roman maritime networks of trade in finished goods, but some clues can be given from the chance finds of Iron Age pottery which have been found within Totland Parish and elsewhere on the Island. In fact the cliffs at Colwell Bay were used as raw materials by the Iron Age Islanders when they made their own pottery well before the Romans arrived on the Island in AD 43.

Recent scientific analysis of "Vectis ware", the Iron Age pottery found at many Island sites has shown that some contain small fossil gastropod shells which were used as a temper in the clay to stop the pot exploding when it was fired in the kiln. The shells have been identified by the Natural History Museum as being of the Genus *Tarebia* and coming

from the Upper Headon Beds of the Eocene period. This geological formation only outcrops in the cliffs of Colwell Bay and it is likely that this is where our Iron Age ancestors collected their pottery making raw materials.

An archaeological examination of these cliffs was carried out in 1999 and recorded Iron Age pottery, an oyster bed in the cliff face which probably provided the filler for other types of Iron Age pottery found on the Island and some special Iron Age pottery known as "Briquetage". Briquetage is name archaeologists give to the heavy pottery pans and vessels which were used to collect sea water to be dried to collect salt. It seems as if the Iron Age Islanders were making use of many of Colwell Bay's natural resources.



Vectis Ware Iron Age pottery

The Roman Period

(43 AD to 410 AD)

When the Romans invaded Britain in AD43 under the Emperor Claudius, they seem to have done so by a combination of treaties with local tribes in some areas and by warfare in others.

There is currently no archaeological evidence for warfare in the West Wight, so it is likely that the Island Celtic tribes came to an agreement with the Romans.

There were many reasons why the Romans invaded Britain including the large amount of agricultural land which could supply the Empire's armies with food, its valuable metal resources such as iron, lead and gold and the political advantage of having conquered another area of tribal enemies.

The biggest impact of the invasion was political as the country was divided into regions called "civitates" and agricultural production and mining operations were placed under Imperial control. But there was probably little change to the daily lives of ordinary Islanders as archaeological evidence shows that they still lived in the same places, and the local pottery industry which had begun in the Late Iron Age continued to produce the "Vectis ware" for local needs.

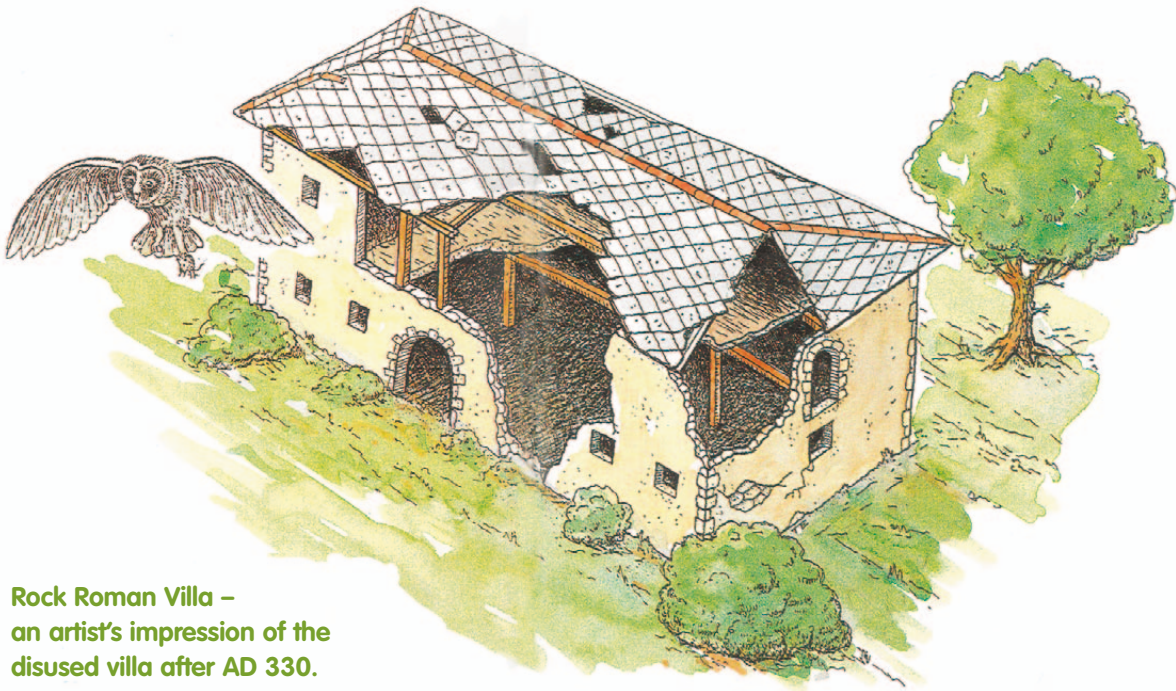
The first signs of social and economic change on the Island was the construction of villa farms which controlled all agricultural production for the Roman Empire. But these early villas were built on or near to late Iron Age settlements, showing that apart from a

change of master, the agricultural way of life of the Iron Age farmers continued under the Romans.

There are 8 known Roman villas on the Isle of Wight. The word "villa" is the Latin term for a farm and most of them were the country homes of wealthy Roman-British farmers. Roman Villas introduced new buildings types to the Island as villas were rectangular in plan, rather than round like the native Iron Age houses. A villa also included a range of functional buildings, such as barns, granaries and workshops.

There are no known Roman Villas in Totland Parish and the nearest is Rock Roman villa which was the first to be discovered on the Island in a ploughed field east of Buddlehole spring near Brighstone in 1840. The villa was a simple "cottage" type villa with a rectangular ground plan and five rooms which would have been entered for a hall which ran along the length of the house.

Full excavation of the site was carried out in the 1970's and revealed that the villa was probably built between AD 275 and 300 and because it was on a steep hillside, a building platform had been prepared by cutting into the hillside and then building a hard floor of



**Rock Roman Villa –
an artist's impression of the
disused villa after AD 330.**

chalk sealed with mortar. The walls were built mainly of flint with local Bembridge limestone and many fragments of painted plaster showed that some rooms were decorated with painted pictures and scenes.

Rock Roman villa was only in use until around AD 330, when the archaeological evidence shows that it was starting to fall down and some time between AD 350 and 400, the west and north walls collapsed, crushing the corn drier and the building went out of use. But the excavation of the Rock Roman villa and of the other villa sites on the Island has revealed much about the daily life of the

villa owners and about life in the Island's Roman villas.

Archaeological evidence from Totland Parish provides more clues to the lives of ordinary Islanders in the Roman period. A type of Roman pottery called Samian ware which was made in Italy has been found near the Alum Bay Old Road. Roman coins have also been found scattered on the sea bed around the Needles. This suggests that pottery and coins were being brought into Totland by sea and were being used in everyday Roman life in Totland.

The Saxon Period (410 AD to 1,066 AD)

The Roman army left Britain in the 4th Century AD when the Roman Empire began to come under attack from neighbouring tribes and had to shrink its borders in order to be able to defend them.

Britain was too far north and consequently was left to fend for itself around AD 410 as documentary sources show. With the political and economic power base removed, several warring groups led by chieftans began to fight for control of certain areas until a number of larger kingdoms emerged in the 7th Century and these were to become the basis of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England which were eventually unified under King Alfred and his descendants of the West Saxon kingdom south of the Thames in the 10th century.

There were several migrations of European peoples from various areas of what is now modern Germany in the early Anglo-Saxon period and documentary sources give us some idea of where they settled. Bede, a

monk writing at the monastery of Jarrow in Northumberland around AD 620, tells us that the settlers came from three tribes in Germany – the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. Bede also goes on to say that the Jutes conquered the Isle of Wight. However as Bede was writing over 200 years after the events, we must be careful of accepting what he says as fact.

Nothing is known yet about the Saxon period in Totland as no archaeological remains have been found. This does not mean that there was no-one living in the parish in this period, it just means that not enough archaeological work has been done.

The Medieval Period (1,066 AD to 1,500 AD)

The Medieval period started with the Norman Conquest in 1066 when William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings.

King William built a network of castles from which to defend his new lands and replaced the English Lords with his Norman allies by handing over their lands and titles to the manors from which they ruled.

Once again, life may not have changed much for the ordinary people as they were obliged by the medieval feudal system to work for their masters and to pay tithes to the church. During the Medieval Period, the parish of Totland may have been fairly isolated with a not very prosperous, rural community. Most medieval (or earlier) archaeological remains

from these rural settlements are now covered by the modern houses and roads of the modern settlements.

Totland had a large amount of downland which was used grazing and the areas of medieval open fields would have been around the very small hamlets and farmsteads. Totland has the largest area of heathland surviving in any parish on the Island, approximately 50 hectares on the plateau gravel at Headon Warren. This would also have been used for grazing in medieval times.



Ridge and Furrow type earthworks are just visible to the right of the remains of a stone wall bordering the track from Knowles Farm to Watershoot Bay, from the West.

Medieval rural settlement was organised into administrative units called "manors" and the Lord of the Manor moved between several Manor houses to give legal judgements, collect taxes and to fulfil his responsibilities to the Crown, Church and his people.

The medieval settlement pattern in Totland probably consisted of numerous hamlets around small greens rather than villages and the medieval landscape has been partially obscured by 19th Century development of seaside resorts at Colwell and Totland.

Surprisingly, there are still some elements of the medieval landscape which survive in Totland Parish. Medieval earthworks, called "Ridge and Furrow" still survive in some modern fields. These are the remains of medieval ploughing as the oxen pulled the plough along the same furrows every season and turned at the headland to create the tell tale humps and dips in the ground. A Beacon,

which was a Medieval fire tower used to signal in times of war, was situated on Headon Warren in 1324 when documentary evidence shows that it was kept by "a watch of 3 men by night and 2 men by day" and another Beacon is known from Tennyson Down.

The period between the Norman Conquest and AD 1300 in England saw the development of towns and the countryside as the population grew until a series of environmental and economic crises, together with the Black Death plague saw the population fall and rural settlements were abandoned during a gradual move of the population from rural areas to the towns. From AD 1350 to AD 1500 towns developed into thriving business and trading centres until the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 brought an end to the medieval period with the accession of King Henry VII and the start of the Tudor dynasty.