

Kynance Gate, Cornwall

Scrub clearance and interpretation



Historic Environment Service (Projects)

Cornwall County Council

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Scrub clearance and interpretation

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The work described in this report was co-ordinated by the Scheduled Monument Management Programme of the Historic Environment Service (formerly Cornwall Archaeological Unit), Environment and Heritage, Cornwall County Council, in liaison with Natural England's Lizard National Nature Reserve Team.

For the Historic Environment Service, Jacky Nowakowski undertook research on Kynance Gate and contributed to the discussions about the reconstruction painting, while various other members of the Service commented on the many drafts of the painting and the board. Rosemary Robertson carefully and elegantly painted the site as it might have looked in the Middle Bronze Age, while Dave Taylor of Cornwall County Council's Design Services transformed the painting into the board that visitors to the site and Helston Museum will enjoy. Sally Ealey of Cornwall Archaeological Society and Janet Spargo of Helston Museum helped in finding copies of Ivor Thomas's notes at Helston Museum, and commented on drafts of the painting and board.

Ray Lawman, site manager for the Lizard National Nature Reserve (in discussion with Vervan Heal of the Historic Environment Service's Advice Team), was the instigator of the project and on site, Steve Townsend, Assistant Site Manager, and Mark Easter, Estate Worker, co-ordinated the scrub clearance, with help from an enthusiastic group from RNAS Culdrose.

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The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the Historic Environment Service projects team and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

Freedom of Information Act

As Cornwall County Council is a public authority it is subject to the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which came into effect from 1st January 2005.

Cover illustration

Watercolour painting of Kynance Gate settlement in the Middle Bronze Age (copyright Rosemary Robertson)

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Summary

This report describes some small-scale management work that took place in 2005 – 2007 at Kynance Gate prehistoric settlement, as part of Cornwall County Council's Scheduled Monument Management Programme. The project included scrub clearance to reveal the hut circles in the autumn of 2005, and the provision of an interpretation board for the site in the summer of 2007. A second version of the board was set up in Helston Museum, where finds and the archive from Kynance Gate are stored. The interpretation board included a reconstruction painting of the settlement by Rosemary Robertson.

The site at Kynance Gate is a Scheduled Monument, Cornwall number 439 and is number 10480 in Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Record; it is located at SW 6870 1388.

1 Introduction

This report describes work that took place at Kynance Gate prehistoric settlement, on the Lizard, in 2005-2007, to improve the presentation and interpretation of the site. The site is located on the Lizard National Nature Reserve, managed by Natural England (formerly English Nature) and the work, which included scrub clearance and the provision of an interpretation board, was undertaken jointly by the Historic Environment Service and Natural England.

The settlement of Kynance Gate is located on the edge of the open moorland plateau of Goonhilly Downs, overlooking the Kynance Valley (Fig 2). It comprises two discrete groups of round houses/hut circles, those to the south being centred around a natural outcrop of serpentine. Excavations in 1896 and from 1953 to 1964 showed that this is a complex multi-period site, with remains extending from the Bronze Age through to medieval times. The current interpretation of the visible buildings is that they represent the remains of a seasonal or transhumance settlement, with potting, metal and stone working taking place in the middle Bronze Age phase, although their layout around a distinctive outcrop resembling a standing stone may suggest a ritual origin. The copious finds from the excavation, which included much pottery and flint, stone artefacts, spindle whorls and a broken axe mould, are in Helston Museum.

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1.1 Project background

Being close to Kynance Cove, a renowned beauty spot owned by the National Trust (Figs 1 and 2), the adjoining nature reserve attracts a substantial number of visitors, but because the settlement had been so heavily overgrown with tall gorse, it was easily overlooked (Fig 4).

Moreover, despite the inherent interest of the site and abundance of information from the excavations, there is no information available locally to guide or inform.

Ray Lawman, Natural England's Reserves Manager on Goonhilly Downs, has had an interest in the site for many years; the current proposal to clear back the scrub and provide interpretation is the result of his initiative and approach to the Historic Environment Service.

1.2 Aims

The aims of the project were therefore that work would take place to improve the access to and interpretation of the settlement by

- Removal of tall gorse
- Treatment of cut stems to prevent regeneration
- Provision of an interpretation board
- The initial aim of making leaflets about the site available was modified in view of a possible clash with the provision of interpretive materials associated with Natural England's HEATH project. Instead, it was decided to provide a copy of the board in poster form to go in the museum at Helston, which has a display on the site and holds a collection of material from excavations that took place here in the 1950s.

2 The conservation work

2.1 The site before clearance

The settlement is under heathland managed by English Nature as part of the Kynance Gate Farm National Nature Reserve (NNR). It is within an area designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a candidate Special Area of Conservation because of the importance of the Lizard Heath. An additional feature of interest here are the lichens growing on the rocks of the central serpentine outcrop.

The heathland on the settlement, comprising mainly thick dense gorse, heather, bramble, and grasses, tends to become rather overgrown, hiding the huts and structures. Gorse was particularly concentrated on the hut walls and on the outcropping serpentine, obscuring the topography and layout of the settlement (Fig 4).

2.2 Scrub clearance

Clearance of scrub from selected structures at Kynance Gate took place on 28th September 2005.

15 volunteers from RNAS Culdrose on a Team Building day out, plus English Nature staff, (Steve Townsend and Mark Easter and for a short while, Jeremy Clitheroe), spent the day clearing gorse from the settlement. The weather was windy and wet, but the day was nevertheless successful and productive (Figs 5, 6).

The day resulted in the clearance of gorse from all of the prominent structures around the serpentine outcrop, that is Huts F1 to F4, and showed all of these houses to be far more impressive than hitherto suspected.

2.3 On-going maintenance

Although formerly managed only by controlled burning, the area is now grazed with cattle and to date this appears to have been effective in keeping the features clear. The site will need monitoring to ensure that it is not becoming overgrown again, and if necessary could be trimmed annually.

Consideration should also be given to clearing scrub from some of the other hut circles, if resources/circumstances permit.

3 The interpretation board

3.1 Creation of the board

The interpretation board underwent a long period of gestation before finally being produced and erected on site. In summary, the process included:

- Initial research by Jacky Nowakowski. The notes she compiled mainly from the various excavation reports written by Ivor Thomas are included here as an appendix.
- From these notes, a summary was written for the board.
- An assessment was made of illustrative materials suitable for inclusion on the board. In the event this proved quite difficult because, for example, it had been hoped to include a photograph of the excavations in progress, but none could be found. It was also initially intended to include a picture of the one Bronze Age pot from the site that has been reconstructed and is now on display in Helston Museum... but as this reconstruction is now considered to be inaccurate, it was

felt inappropriate to include.

- A reconstruction ‘painting’ was commissioned from artist Rosemary Robertson, to be the main feature on the board (cover). Creation of this involved an initial discussion, a site visit, and the production of two drafts for comment: one in black and white and the second in colour pencil, before the final watercolour painting was undertaken.
- Copies of pages from the excavator’s notebooks (some featuring small sketches of sherds of pottery) were obtained from Heston Museum.
- All texts and materials were passed on to Cornwall County Council’s Design Team for compilation into the board.
- Various drafts of the board design were commented on and modified as appropriate.
- Natural England and Helston Museum were consulted on the design.

Finally, two slightly different versions were produced: one, with a dark background, as the board to go on site (Fig 8) and a second, with a light background, for display in Helston Museum (Fig 9). At this stage, proofs were provided and care taken to ensure that the colour reproduction of the board matched the colour of the original painting as closely as possible.

3.2 Erection on site

The board was set up on a cairn constructed by Natural England staff.

4 Recommendations

Now that there is a board on site with information about the settlement, it is essential that the hut circles are kept clear and visible. The following is therefore recommended:

- The effectiveness of grazing in the area should be monitored regularly and, if it is not proving successful in keeping scrub at bay.....
- ..The settlement should be strimmed once a year
- If possible, some of the other hut circles should be cleared, starting with the group of three to the north-east of the serpentine outcrop (A1 to A3 on Ivor Thomas’s plan).

5 Project archive

The HES project number is **2005048**

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of the Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration, as well as copies of documentary/cartographic source material
2. Digital photographs stored in the directory ..\Images\Sites\Sites I-L\Kynance Gate
3. This report text is held in digital form as: G:\CAU\HE PROJECTS\SITES\SITES K\KYNANCE GATE BOARD AND SCRUB 2005-6\KYNANCE GATE REPORT 2.DOC

Appendix: notes on Kynance Gate settlement by Jacky Nowakowski

Note:

Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) contains a full list of references to published works on Kynance Gate settlement.

Background to site investigations

1. **1896** RIC excursion to the Lizard. The party spent an afternoon partly digging the site. 2 hut circles were examined to "floor" level and finds placed in RIC in 1897.
2. **1918** Discovery of fragments of a wheeled turned pot c. 1st century AD found at the site – although not recovered through proper excavation.
3. 11 seasons of excavation from **1953 to 1964** by Ivor Thomas and the Lizard Field Club.

Main discoveries

Round house settlement with 2 main phases of activity

1. Middle Bronze Age c. 1200 BC
2. "Reoccupied" in middle Iron Age c. 500 BC until 1st century AD
3. Pottery of medieval date was found although no structures of this date identified.

In plan

Two groups of round houses with enclosures – the northern group and the southern group.

1. The **northern group** – there is *no adequate plan* of this group of structures which are said to comprise at **least 5 freestanding round houses**. Each with average diameter of 9 metres and stone walls up to 0.4 m high. Possibly 12 houses of this type within this group. Only one house in this group was excavated in 1954 – this was house G.

House G – only (half) partly excavated. 7 metres in diameter. Walls made of stone – coursed outer and inner faces and bonded by stone rubble infill and up to 2 metres wide. Entrance way located in the south-west. Threshold paved.

Two stone-lined hearth pits were found inside and some postholes but not enough of the ground plan was uncovered to reveal the pattern of the post ring. Finds indicated at least two phases of occupation MBA and IAge.

A **trackway** was recorded as linking the northern group with the southern group.

2. The **southern group** comprised **at least 9 round houses**. Plan *does exist* of this group. This is a complex plan but essentially shows **two principal related enclosed spaces each with round houses**.

The main group of buildings were positioned **around a natural outcrop** of serpentine rock. In plan, **four round houses** with substantial stone walls were linked by a “**vallum wall**” to form an **enclosed courtyard** – at the centre of which was the outcrop. On the north-east side of the main courtyard was a **smaller inner oval courtyard defined by built stone and earth walling** making use of the natural outcropping. There were two main entranceways leading into the main area – one in the north and the other in the south-east. An **additional enclosed space** was formed by a wall built upon on a lynchet attached to the main courtyard on the north-east – it formed a **terrace** which, its on southern side, ended as a natural outcrop. Here **round huts** A1, A2, A3 all linked by short stretches of walling were found.

Round houses F1, F2, F3, F4

Both F2 and F3 had entrances facing into the main courtyard looking – towards the east. We assume that these buildings **were originally BA in date** with some reuse in the Iron Age (although see below for F1 and F4).

Round house F3 most extensively excavated with three main phases of occupation. A stone walled round house with **large stone slabs forming inner and outer faces** with rubble infill. No coherent posthole arrangement was found but we assume that the building would have had **a single post ring upholding the conical roof**. The eaves of the roof we presume would have rested on the stone walls and slightly overhang the outer faces of the main structure. **Each interior occupation surface was paved** except for its lowest BA levels. Inside **six small hearth pits were found at the earliest occupation**

level on a solid made-up “honey-coloured” clay and charcoal floor. 4 were clustered near centre of the floor. All were small and circular less and averaged 0.50 ms in diameter. Open hearths lying on the thin made-up floor directly onto bedrock.

Note this house was “reoccupied” in the Iron Age with some modifications made to it and the construction inside of house O.

Houses F1 and F4 produced later material (Late Iron Age/Roman) and had doorways leading away (outside) the main vallum area.

House F2 in common with **F3** faced into the courtyard area. Had only partly excavated but would seem to have seen the same history of occupation as house F3.

Around the Natural outcrop

The area around this was explored and to the south and west here a **paved floor /surface** was found – BA in date. A series of **small open hearths** were found. Remains of a collapsed “**kiln**” together with the fragments of the Kynance Jar (Helston Museum) were found. Flints found in this area suggest “**working floor**”. One small circular stone lined **hearth had a stone-lined trench – perhaps a flue** - attached to it and this was **linked to a larger square hearth pit**. The fragments of a **clay mould** for a flat bronze axe were found in the smaller hearth. Evidence suggests a **degree of metalworking**. All these features do not appear to have positioned within roofed structures and therefore were open to the elements. The outcrop was clearly the focus for some craft -related industrial activities which we can only assume was BA in date.

Later phases – Iron Age and Roman

It is likely that the additional enclosed space forming a terrace attached to the main courtyard area (see above) is wholly of later Iron Age date. Of the three oval “elliptical” stone buildings examined here (that is A1, A2 and A3), **A1** was the only one fully examined and it exhibited a different construction build. Here the earliest pottery dates the building to c. 4th century BC. Its doorway faced east and the building was built on a level rammed clay foundation overlain by paving stones. The rear walls were built as a revetment into the terrace and stone lined rammed with clay infill. Inside the doorway was a paved “alcove” built into the walls and which contained two hearths. There was also a raised stone

platform on the eastern side of the building built against the inner wall. The threshold was paved and a “cooking” hole was found outside the building against the southern side of the terrace wall.

Material culture inventory

- 3300 sherds of pottery were found
- 3000 flints
- pebbles, stones and fragments of gabbro, serpentine and quartz were found
- 4 stone spindles whorls
- 6 clay spindle whorls
- 2 serpentine stone rings
- 4 glass beads
- 2 “faience” beads (not confirmed).

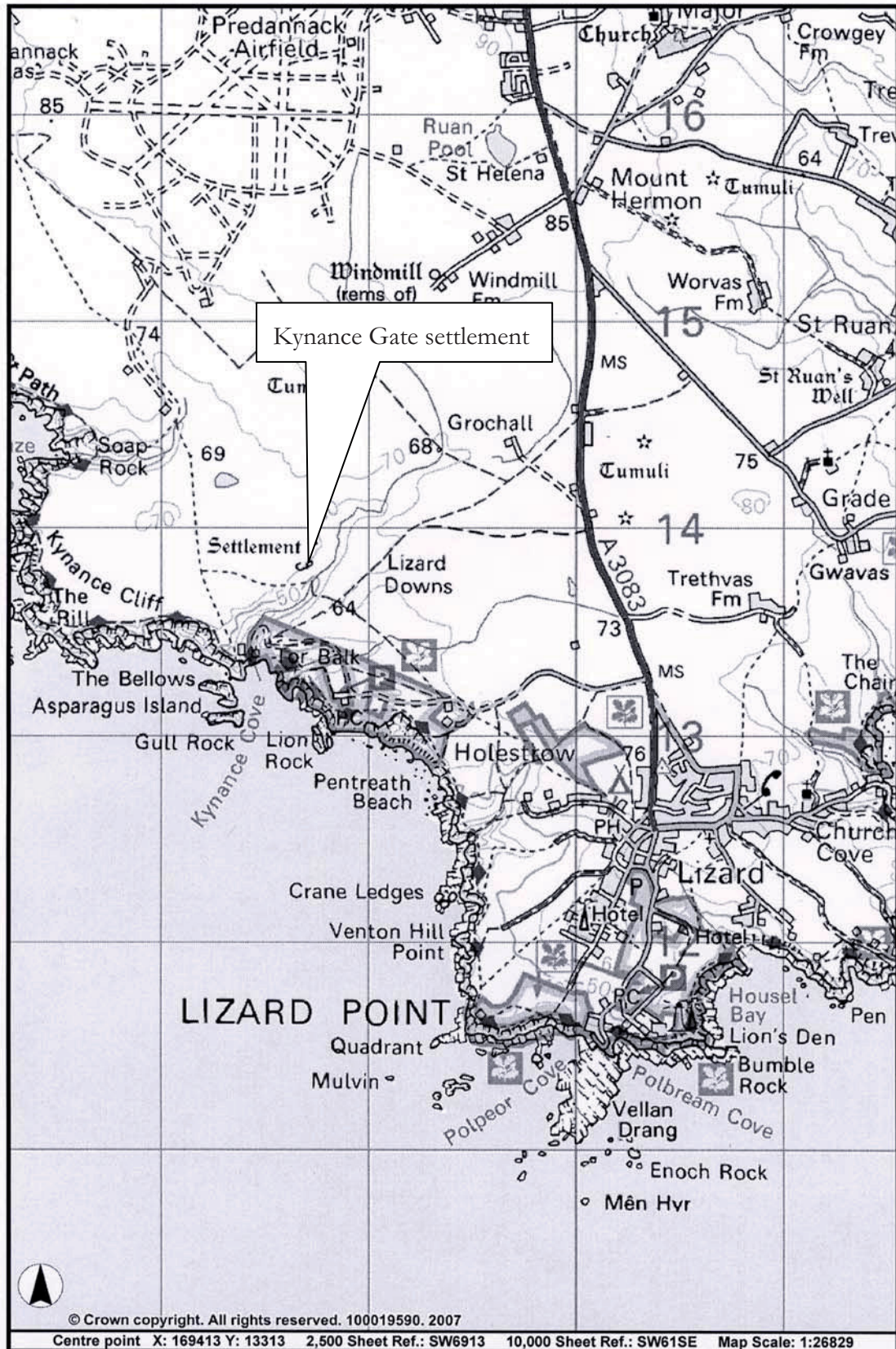


Fig 1 Location map

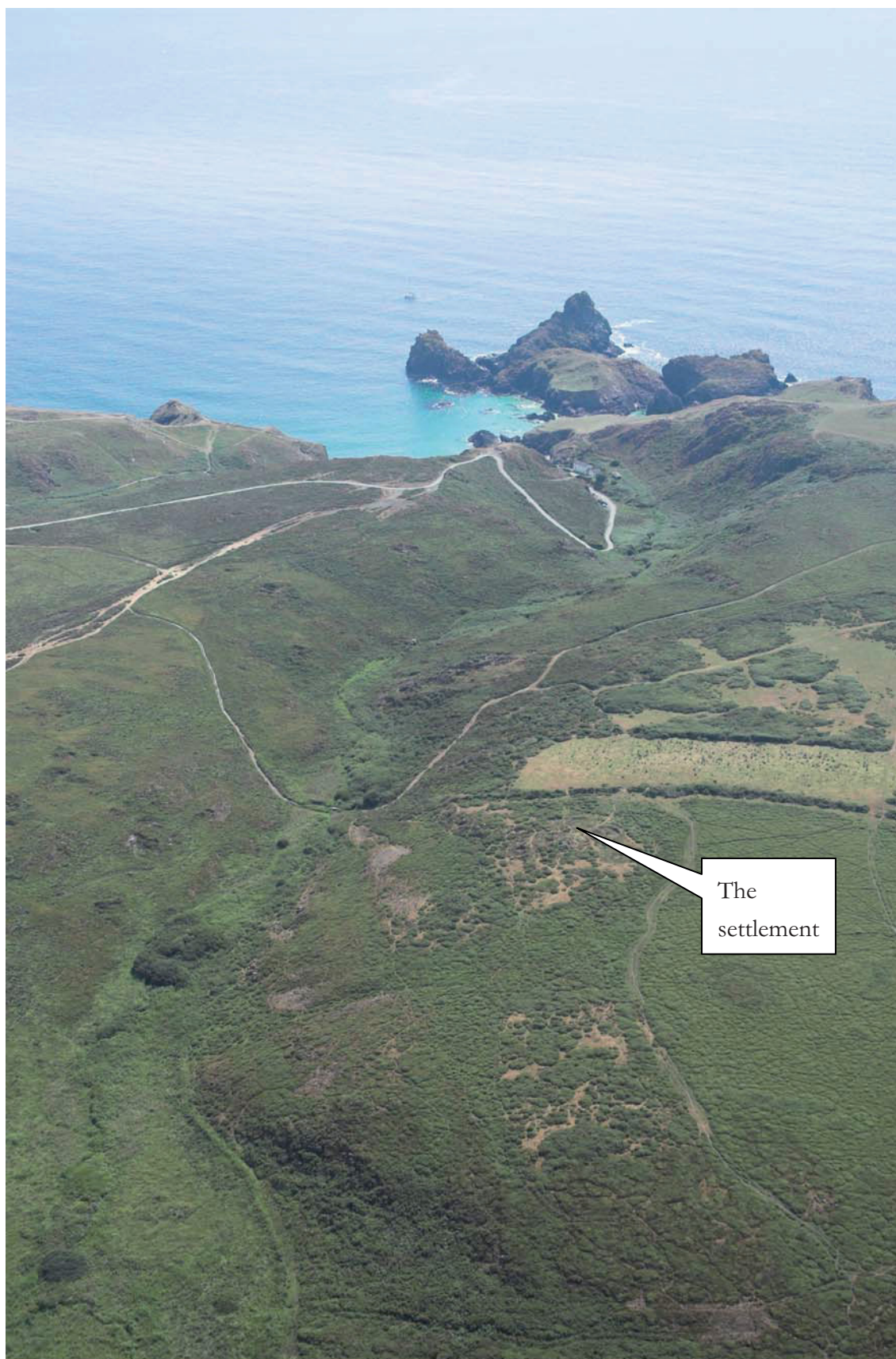


Fig 2 Air photo showing the location of the settlement (HES photo: F74-25-07-06\F74-102)

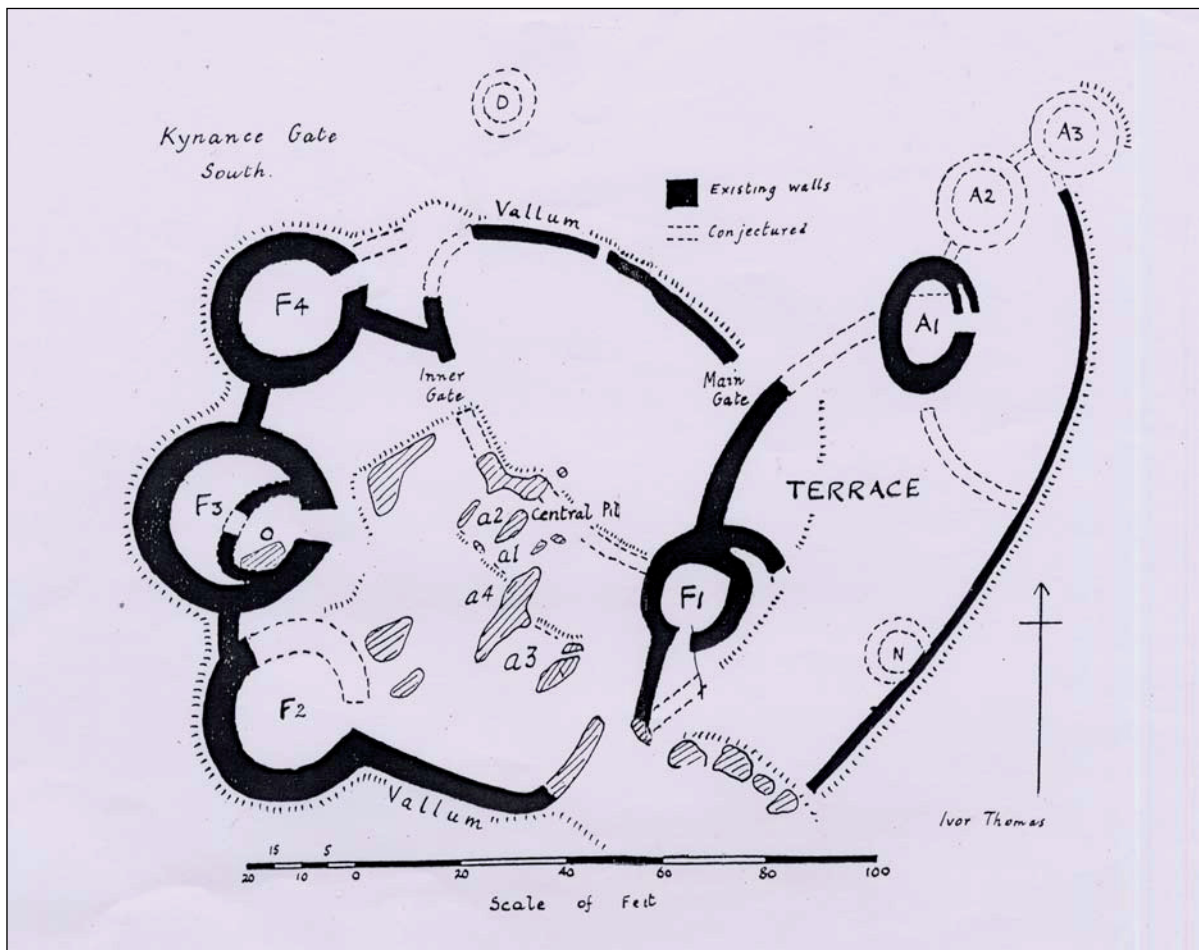


Fig 3 Ivor Thomas's plan of the excavated settlement



Fig 4 The site before scrub clearance



Fig 5 Clearing scrub from the hut circles



Fig 6 One of the hut circles after scrub clearance



Fig 7 Rosemary Robertson recording the site for the reconstruction painting

Over:

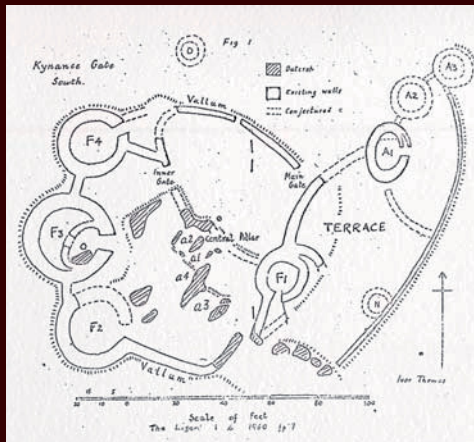
Fig 8 The interpretation board (on-site version with dark background)

Fig 9 The interpretation board (Helston Museum's version, with light background)

KYNANCE GATE PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT

Clustered around the rocky outcrop at Kynance Gate are the remains of a prehistoric settlement occupied first in the Bronze Age. Following a period of abandonment, it was occupied again in the Iron Age (500 BC - AD 100) and finally in medieval times.

Most of our information about the site comes from an 11-season campaign of excavation carried out from 1953 to 1964 by Ivor Thomas, a local school master.



Ivor Thomas's 1960 plan of the main group of houses. The three largest houses feature in the illustration.

Over 3,000 pieces of pottery were found, along with flints, spindle whorls, glass beads and a broken axe mould. Finds from the excavations can be seen in Helston Museum.



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Design: The Design Team, Cornwall County Council
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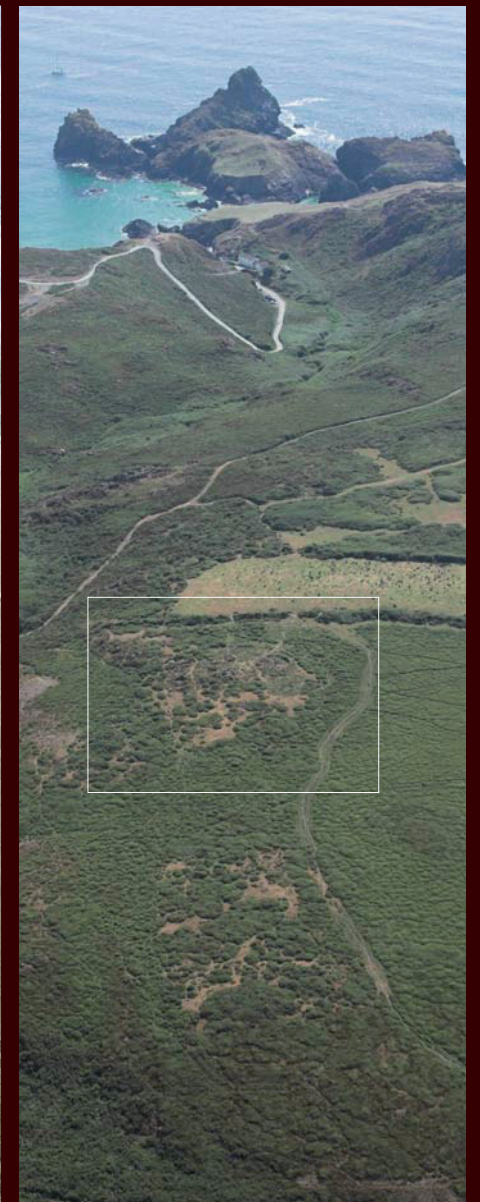
Main illustration © Rosemary Robertson 2006.

Notebook with drawings made by Ivor Thomas during the excavations (courtesy of Helston Museum).



In this illustration of the Middle Bronze Age phase of the settlement, people who have recently arrived on the downs for the summer grazing season are shown repairing the roof of one of the round houses, with reeds collected from the valley below.

Craft and industrial activities took place outside, in the shelter of the central serpentine pillar, where excavations have uncovered the remains of several hearths and a possible furnace.



This 2006 air photo shows the location of the settlement, set in isolation on the Lizard downs, above the steep-sided valley that gives the locality its name: Kynance is derived from Cornish *kew-nans, meaning 'ravine'.

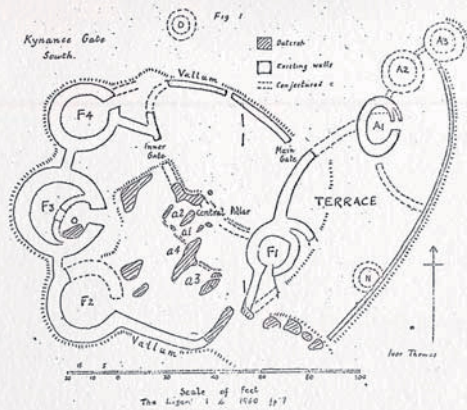
The settlement was occupied in the summer only, by folk coming up onto the downs from permanent settlements in more sheltered and fertile parts of the Lizard. While stock grazed the extensive rough pastures of the downs, the peoples' spare time was spent in spinning, potting, making flint tools and metal artefacts, and perhaps in cultivating a few quick-growing crops in small fields nearby.



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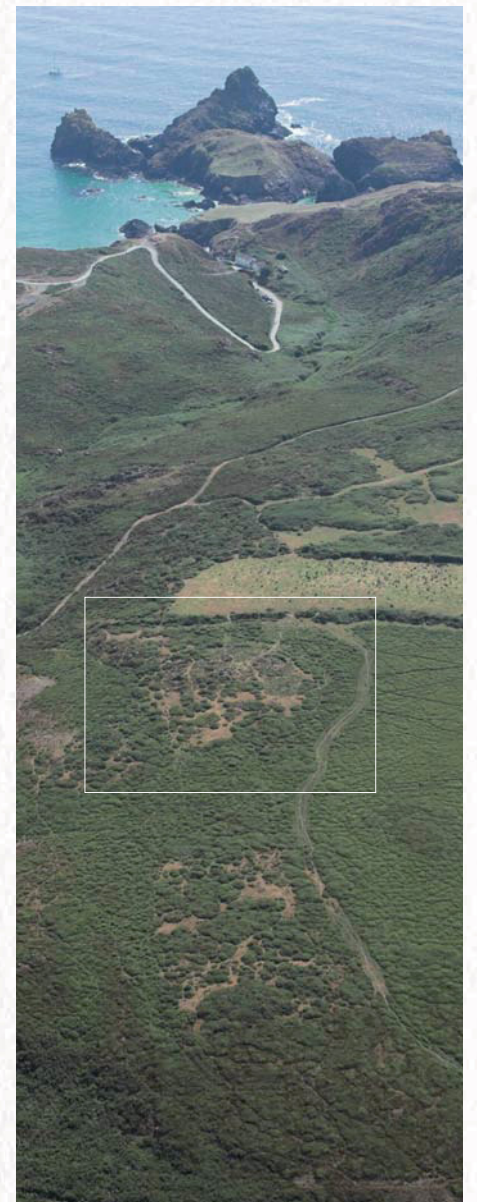
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