

# **Excavation of later prehistoric and Roman sites along the route of the Newquay Strategic Road Corridor, Cornwall**

Andy M Jones

with contributions from

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**SECTION 1**  
**BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT**



# Chapter 1

## Introduction to the project

Andy M Jones

### Background

In 2014 Cornwall Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Cormac Solutions, Cornwall Council, to undertake a programme of archaeological excavations in advance of the construction of the first stage of the Newquay Strategic Road (SW 832 604) (Figs 1.1 and 1.2). This report covers the archaeological recording carried out along the road corridor during the winter of 2014.

This project led to the uncovering of a large number of archaeological features, spanning later prehistory to the Roman period. They included a Middle Bronze Age roundhouse, structures and field boundaries of Middle and Late Iron Age date, and settlement features belonging to the Roman period. The excavated features provided evidence for increasing enclosure and occupation in the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods. The chronological range and density of features was greater than anticipated and the outcome has resulted in a far more significant set of results than were envisaged at the outset.

In the light of the very significant results relating to the later prehistoric and Roman periods (Smith 2015), the decision was made to draw the results together into a single publication, which could allow for the consideration and synthesis of the results at a local, regional and, where appropriate, national level.

### Report structure

This resulting monograph is divided into four sections. The first (this section) provides the background to the project and gives a brief overview of related sites and the programme of archaeological recording undertaken. It also describes the setting of the project area and the geological background.

The second section outlines the stratigraphical results from the major excavated sites, by chronological periods: Neolithic, Bronze Age, Middle Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Roman. As will be seen, although these are treated as discrete entities in this chapter and in Chapter 2, the following sections break down these rigid distinctions somewhat, especially between the Late Iron Age and Roman periods, where there is little to differentiate the two archaeologically.

The third section contains detailed specialist reports on the artefacts, including the ceramics, flint and worked stone (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Analyses of the plant macrofossils and the charcoal (Chapters 6 and 7) are also reported in this section, as well as the results from radiocarbon dating (Chapter 8).

The concluding section draws together the results from the analyses of the excavated sites and places them within a wider context with other excavated sites in Cornwall and beyond (Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12). This section is in three principal parts. After an introduction (Chapter 9), the first synthesises the results from the excavation and post-excavation analyses and uses this material to examine comparanda for the excavation results (Chapter 10). Structure, form and function and comparanda for the excavated structures are considered, as well as the evidence for the development of the surrounding landscape. In particular, the possible importance of the large multi-circuit enclosure at Manuels, which lies 700m to the south east, is highlighted in relation to the excavated sites. Chapter 11 can almost be read as a stand-alone essay, as it reviews the evidence for placed deposits in structures, pits and ditches and other contexts. It also considers the evidence for deliberate abandonment of structures, which it is suggested was not only a feature of the Middle Bronze Age but was also associated with Late Iron Age and Roman period buildings. The similarities and contrasts in practice are discussed and the opportunity is taken to review these practices in Cornwall and other parts of Britain. The final chapter provides a brief overview of the results and suggests avenues for further research (Chapter 12).

### Terminology used in this report

Throughout this report structures are denoted by numbers without brackets; for example, Structure 2. Context numbers for cuts – ditches, pits, postholes and similar features – are shown in square brackets [127] and their fills, layers and other deposits are shown with round brackets: (126).

The term ring-gully is used throughout the report to denote ditching around the perimeter of both structures and hollows of circular or oval shape.

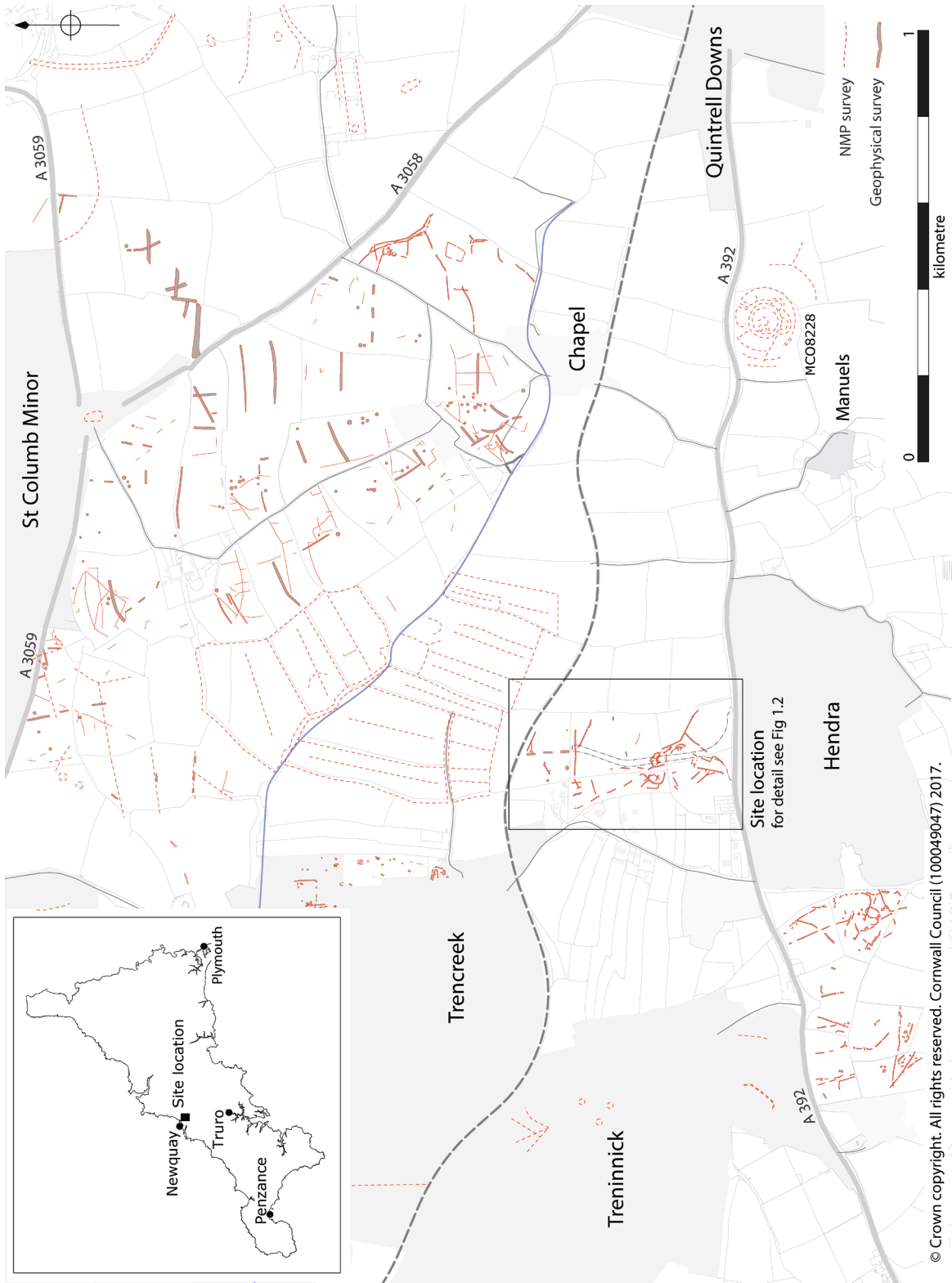


Figure 1.1 Location map showing archaeological features located by geophysical survey and the National Mapping Programme in the area around the Newquay Strategic Road corridor. The urban core of Newquay town centre is to the north west, shading represents modern suburban and leisure development on the resort's western fringe.



Figure 1.2 Results from the geophysical survey of the Newquay Strategic Road corridor and Field numbers.



The radiocarbon dating probability distributions (Chapter 8, Fig 8.1 and Table 8.1) were calculated using OxCal v4.2, including those from earlier excavations; calibrated determinations cited in the text may therefore differ from older published sources. Unless stated otherwise, the 95 per cent level of probability has been used throughout this volume.

**Location and background**

The investigated road corridor lies on the eastern edge of Newquay, on the north side of the Trevemper Bridge to Quintrell Downs road, directly opposite Hendra Tourist Park, Newquay (Fig 1.1). The scheme comprised a road corridor which measured approximately 375m in length and 15m wide, except for the southern end which was widened to 100m to accommodate a new roundabout.

The underlying bedrock geology has been identified as part of the Meadfoot Group Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone of the Devonian period (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1974), overlain by well-drained fine loamy soils. Prior to the excavations the land had been used for pasture, although aerial photographs reveal that the fields had been ploughed in the recent past.

The road corridor cut across the western edge of an east-west orientated ridge. The southern end of the corridor was located on the south side of the summit of the ridge. The overlying topsoil in this area was quite thin and the exposed archaeological features quite shallow;

ploughing is likely to have truncated archaeological deposits including the poorly preserved Structure 2 (Fig 1.3). The stripped area became more level, reaching a height of approximately 75m OD, and the covering soil was deeper across this area. The northern half of the corridor sloped increasingly steeply down towards the valley which lay beyond.

As the ridge is elevated above the surrounding landscape, there are extensive views from the excavated sites across the surrounding area. The north Cornish coast and at least two Early Bronze Age barrows are clearly visible three kilometres to the north, and the Gannel estuary, a historically important waterway with many prehistoric and Roman period sites and find-spots adjacent to it, lies a similar distance to the west (Nowakowski *et al* 2009). Castle-an-Dinas hillfort, approximately 11.5 kilometres to the east, is a prominent landscape feature (Wailes 1963; Jones, forthcoming a) (Fig 1.5). In addition to large monuments, the Newquay hinterland also contains a large number of later prehistoric to Roman period settlement sites (see Nowakowski and Quinnell 2011, fig 17.1). These include a crop mark round 1 kilometre to the north of the site (Cornwall HER MCO33168) and archaeological investigations at Tregunnel and Trevithick Manor have revealed evidence for prehistoric settlement (Cotswold Archaeology 2012; Cornwall HER MCO55974).

A complex cropmark enclosure at Manuels (Cornwall HER MCO8228) lies 700m to the south east. This,



Figure 1.3 The truncated Structure 2, located at the southern end of the road corridor.



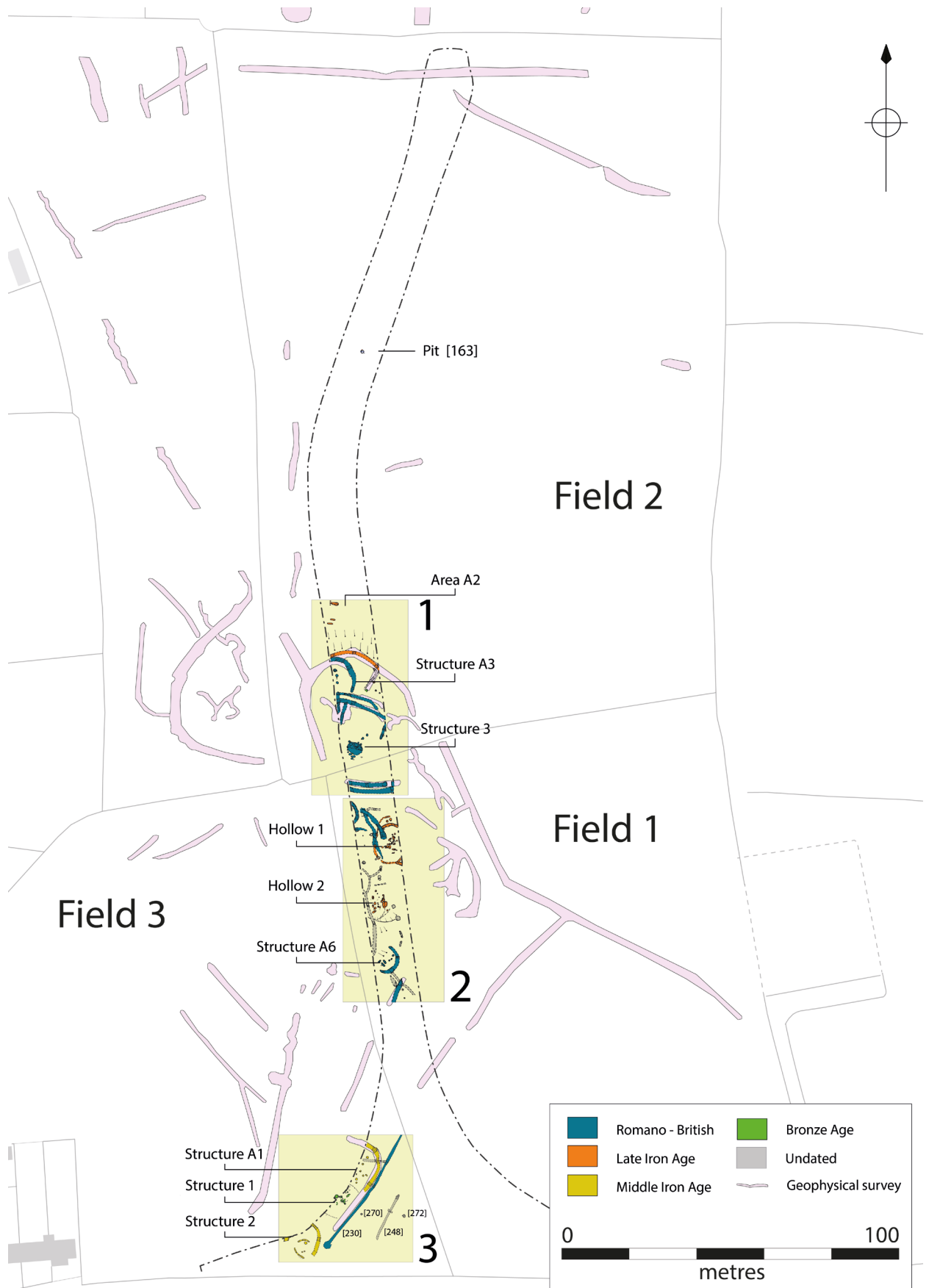


Figure 1.4 Overview showing excavated archaeological features in relation to the results from the geophysical survey.

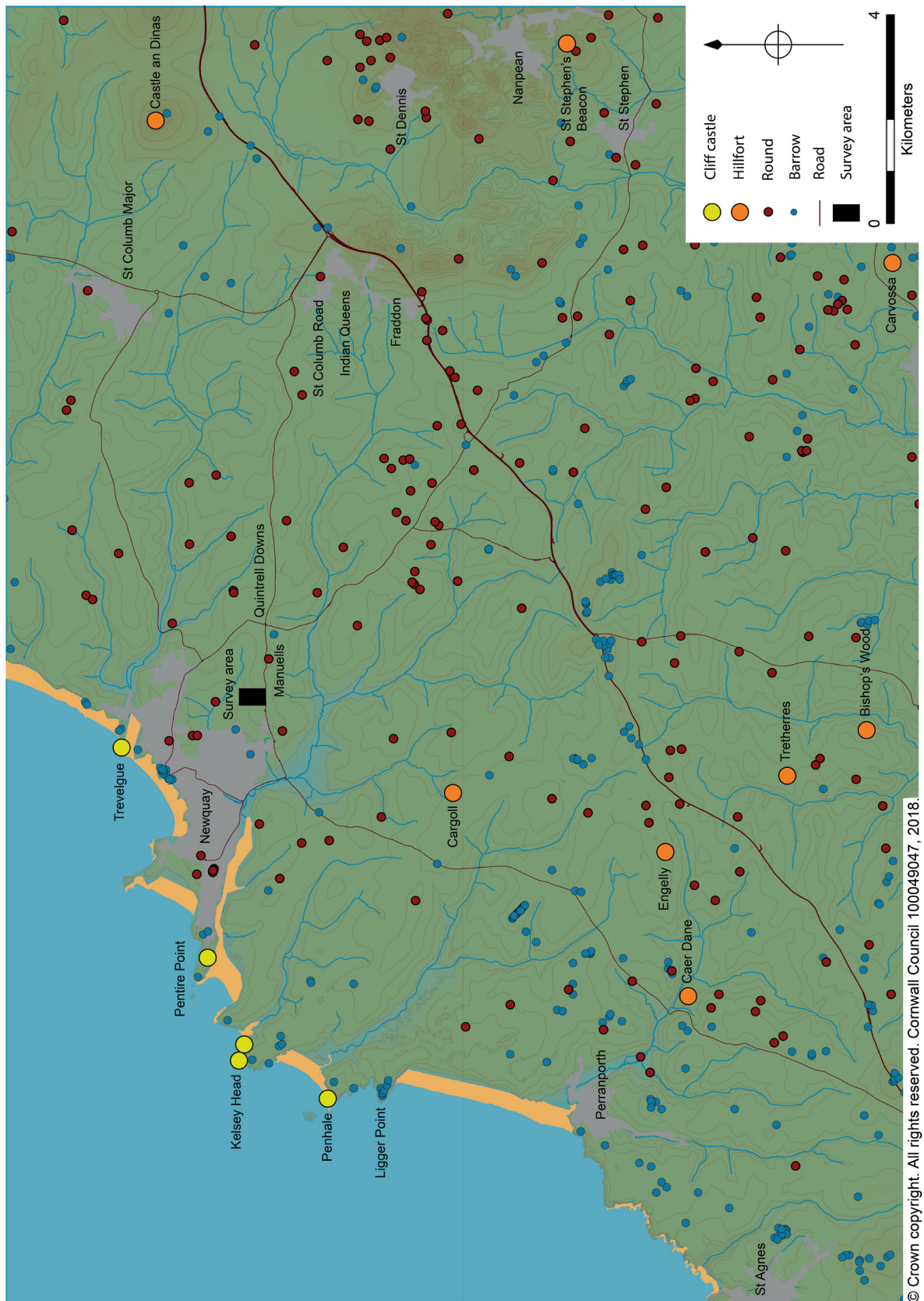


Figure 1.5 Archaeological sites in the area surrounding the Newquay Strategic Road corridor, including barrows, large enclosures, cliff castles and rounds.

although now substantially levelled, is likely to have been the most significant site in the immediate area during the later prehistoric and Roman period (chapter 10). This site is located on the north-eastern slope of the end of the ridge and is a very large, multiple ditched enclosure, the eastern side of which is partially fossilized in an upstanding field boundary. Although the enclosure has not been investigated archaeologically it is probably of first millennium cal BC and / or Roman period date and is likely to have been an important place in the landscape (Jones and Smith 2015; Chapter 10, below).

Prior to the excavations little was known of the archaeology of the immediate area of the development. The potential for the road corridor to contain buried archaeological remains had, however, been shown by a geophysical survey (Figs 1.2 and 1.4) and archaeological evaluation trenching. Subsequent archaeological excavation of fields approximately 1.5 kilometres to the north east at the development site known as Nansledan has revealed substantial evidence for later prehistoric and Roman period settlement activity (Rainbird and Pears, forthcoming).

The geophysical survey was carried out in evaluative strips across the fields through which the road would be cut. Despite the gaps between the surveyed areas, it identified a large number of features of potential archaeological interest (Bunn 2011). The anomalies included an enclosure of probable prehistoric or Roman period date at the centre of the surveyed area, which appeared to be surrounded by ditches associated with a field system (Fig 1.1). A large number of pit-type anomalies were also detected, indicative of an intense occupation. The route of the road corridor was set to pass through this area of high activity, although many

of the features identified by the survey lay beyond the east and west boundaries of the road scheme and were therefore outside the scope of the subsequent mitigation work.

In 2011 Cotswold Archaeology (Joyce 2011) excavated a series of evaluation trenches along the route of the proposed road corridor and in the fields to the east and west of the projected line of the road. The results from the trenching confirmed the presence of buried archaeological features, including pits and ditches, together with artefacts of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date. The evaluation confirmed the results of the geophysical survey, established the character of the archaeology within the road corridor and demonstrated the need for detailed archaeological recording to take place in advance of construction of the road.

### **Methodology**

The soil stripping along the length of the road corridor was carried out under archaeological supervision using a machine fitted with a toothless bucket. Where significant features were encountered, their location was recorded and highlighted as an area requiring further investigation (Smith 2015).

The stripped road corridor was divided into three zones deriving from the fields through which it passed: the northern part of the site fell within Field 2; Fields 1 and 3 were located at the southern end and demarcated the eastern and western parts of the corridor respectively (Figs 1.2 and 2.1). Archaeological features within these areas were then grouped. Potential buildings were given structure numbers (for example, Structure 1). Hollows with associated features were also given unique identifying numbers (for example, Hollow 1).