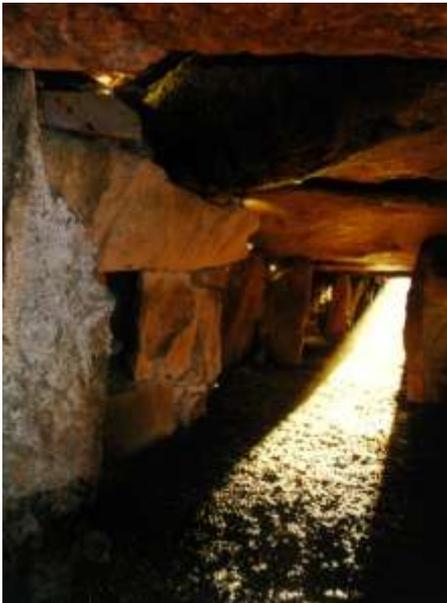


# The Neolithic Spiritual Landscape

For the earliest inhabitants of the island, certain places had a special significance and these were often marked in some way to highlight the spiritual nature of the place. The earliest known religious or ritual sites in the island are the dolmens and memoirs built by the Neolithic farmers over 6,000 years ago. The central theme of their religion appears to have been based around a central goddess and her consort and the consequent fertility rites would have played an important part in the lives of these early farmers. While dolmen are popularly called tombs, judging by the artefacts found associated with them as monuments with a religious significance. The burials were simply one aspect of this.

The mound, which was sometimes raised over these monuments or their location on a headland or their visibility from the sea, meant that they were meant to be seen as a landmark. In the light of this they could be interpreted as monuments to the clan ancestors, to past achievements, to potential and continuity: a declaration of territorial rights and clan immortality.



The sacred nature of these sites carried on for thousands of years and even survived the change of religion - the Gallo-Roman fanum or temple built at the Pinnacle, St Ouen on the Neolithic site and the Christian chapels built on the mound of the Neolithic dolmen at La Hougue Bie are examples of this. A most extreme example of this can be seen in the building of St Andrew's Church in 1923 adjacent to the Neolithic Ville es Nouveaux dolmen and the Iron Age cremation urnfield.

*Sunrise on the spring equinox enters the passage of La Hougue Bie*

## La Hougue Bie, Grouville

This Neolithic passage grave was in use around 6,000 years ago (4000-3250 BC). It is one of the largest and best preserved passage graves in Europe.

It was first excavated in 1924 when human remains, pottery, flint tools, beads, animal bones were found inside the tomb. In the 1990s excavations exposed the original entrance to the passage and an equinoctial alignment was discovered at this time.

A stone vaulted chapel was erected on the summit of the mound in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was later remodelled in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and became a local centre of pilgrimage.

In 1792 Philippe d’Auvergne enveloped the chapel in a miniature Neo-Gothic ‘castle’ which became a famous landmark known as the Prince’s Tower.

During World War II the German forces built a battalion command bunker on the site.

### **La Sergenté, St Brelade**



This passage grave was built around 6,500 years ago (c. 4,500-3250 BC). It consists of a short passage leading into a circular chamber of drystone construction and would originally have had a corbelled roof. The passage and chamber are paved with granite slabs, except for an area in the southwest corner which is partitioned off by a curved line of slabs set on end. The site was covered by a mound prior to excavation in 1923. No human remains were found and the only finds were four pottery vessels. This is the only corbelled passage grave known in the Channel Islands and possibly the earliest dolmen in the island.

### **La Table des Marthes, St Brelade**

This massive granite slab is probably a capstone which covers a now in-filled chamber. The original form of the monument is unknown as the area has been considerably altered when the railway was extended to La Corbière in 1899. Investigations by J P Ahier in 1850 suggest that the slab was resting upon two “pillars” of rubble. Finds from the site include stone axes and fragments of pottery as well as evidence of burning in the interior.

La Table de Marthes is of historical importance, as it believed to have been used as a location for signing legal contracts.

### **Les Blanches Banques, St Brelade**

#### **The Ossuary**

This Chalcolithic rectangular cist grave (2850-2250BC) was excavated in 1923 and partially reconstructed in 1972. It contained the disarticulated remains of around twenty individuals. The human remains consisted mainly of skulls and long bones which suggests that the site was a repository for bodies that had been exposed and de-fleshed elsewhere. Two decorated pots called Jersey Bowls were found in the grave.

#### **The Menhirs (2850-1500BC)**

Three menhirs or standing stones can be seen in the dunes. The Broken Menhir and Little Menhir close to the Ossuary and the Great Menhir on rising ground 350 metres

to the south. They were all excavated and restored during the 1920s. It is not known whether these stones had a ritual use or whether their function was entirely practical, perhaps as boundary markers.

### **La Tête des Quennevais**

This Chalcolithic ritual complex (2850-2250BC) was discovered in 1986 on the high land immediately overlooking the Ossuary. It consists of a small earth mound, with a facing of granite and shale boulders, associated with an earth platform and two small stone cists (boxes). Fragments of several Jersey Bowls were found beneath the mound, as well as flint arrowheads and fragments of stone axes.

### **Le Mont Ubé, St Clement**

This passage grave was built around 6,000 years ago (c. 4000-3250 BC). It consists of a passage leading into an oval chamber with four internal cells. There may have been an outer ring of stones and a low mound over the site. Unfortunately the site was badly destroyed by quarrymen before it was excavated in 1848. It had also been used as a rubbish dump and a pigsty. Finds from the site include burnt bone from the internal cells, fragments of decorated pottery, polished stone axes, stone pendants and a Roman gaming piece which must have fallen in after the tomb was closed.

### **Ville-és-Nouaux, St Helier**

This is a Late Neolithic gallery grave (or allée couverte) (3250-2250 BC). It consists of a rectangular chamber set within an enclosure of upright stones, which may originally have formed the edge of a long low mound that covered the monument. Only seven



of the capstones remain. The site was excavated in 1869 by S P Oliver and F Porter and re-excavated by Bellis & Cable in 1883. Evidence from within the tomb shows two distinct periods of use, the older layer had few finds but the upper layer contained the remains of numerous decorated beakers and Chalcolithic Jersey Bowls.

This is a Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic cist-in-circle (2850-2250 BC). The central stone cist (box) would probably have contained human remains but was found to be totally empty when excavated in 1883 by Bellis & Cable. The cist was originally surrounded by a ring of rocks set on edge and covered by a low mound.

A number of roughly made urns containing cremated human remains were found buried close to the tombs these are typical of a late Bronze or early Iron Age grave (800-450 BC).

### **La Hougue Boëte, St John**

This monument was built around 6,000 years ago (4000-3250 BC). It consists of a large mound with a massive rectangular stone cist (box) in the centre. The mound has been badly eroded so that its original shape and size are unknown. It was excavated in 1911 by Raworth and Mauger who claim to have found within the cist the skeleton of a horse, with the remains of a man lying over it. This is very unusual for a monument of this age. Other finds include a fragment of polished stone axe, pottery and a flint tool.

La Hougue Boëte is also of interest for it is believed to be the site of a Seigneurial court

### **Dolmen de Faldouët, St Martin**

This passage grave was built around 6,000 years ago (c. 4000-3250 BC). It consists of a passage leading into an unusual double chamber. The main chamber is open and surrounded by a series of side chambers, the second is covered by a massive 24-ton capstone. The whole site was originally covered by a low mound with two drystone walls and a ring of upright stones. The site was recorded as early as 1682 and excavated three times before 1910. Human remains were found in the side chambers and finds from the chamber include pottery vessels, two polished stone axes and two stone pendants.



### **Le Dolmen du Couperon, St Martin**

This gallery grave (or allée couverte) was built around 5,000 years ago (3250-2250 BC). It consists of a rectangular chamber set within an enclosure of upright stones, which may originally have formed the edge of a long low mound that covered the monument. The site has been badly excavated and restored, first in 1868 and again in 1919.

An interesting feature of the monument is the porthole slab which now blocks the entrance. It was incorrectly placed here during restoration in 1919. The stone would originally have been positioned to separate the main chamber from an antechamber. Finds from the site include flint flakes and pottery fragments.

### **Dolmen de Géonnais, St Ouen**

This passage grave was built around 6,000 years ago (4000-3250BC). It consists of a passage leading into an unusual chamber which was originally 'D' shaped but later extended to produce a large open rectangular chamber. The site was first excavated in 1929 and was reinvestigated between 1985 and 1990. The site had been badly

damaged by quarrymen who took many of the stones. Excavation revealed the position of these stones and they have now been replaced with granite blocks. Finds from the site include a large number of flint tools, decorated pottery fragments and broken querns.

### **Les Monts Grantez, St Ouen**

This passage grave was built around 6,000 years ago (c. 4000-3250 BC) and consists of a passage leading into an asymmetrical chamber with an external side chamber. A mound covered the structure prior to excavations in 1912. Seven skeletons (six adults



and a child) were found in the chamber, all were in a crouched position, lying on their sides and accompanied by limpet shells, bones of cattle, deer, horse, pig and goat and small piles of brightly colourful pebbles. An eighth skeleton was buried in a seated position in the passage. Other finds include a variety of pottery vessels, including a miniature cup and perforated shallow saucer, stone implements and a spindle whorl.

### **Le Pinnacle, St Ouen**

Le Pinnacle is one of the most important prehistoric sites in the Channel Islands. It takes its name from a massive granite stack which rises out of the sea.



The earliest deposits date to the Early Neolithic (c4800 BC). Substantial quantities of pottery, animal bone and stone tools (including a unique series of dolerite picks and several unfinished stone axes) were excavated which suggests that this was an axe-production centre.

An earth platform was constructed at the foot of Le Pinnacle during the Chalcolithic period (c2850 BC) and seems to have been an open-air ceremonial site. Finds included Beaker pottery, an axe and knife and arrowheads made from French flint.

Later deposits on the site range from a Bronze Age earth rampart, Iron Age artefacts and a Gallo-Roman 'fanum' (a shrine or temple) from about 200 AD.

### **La Hougue des Platons, Trinity**

This cist-in-circle was built around 5,000 years ago ( 2850-2250 BC). It consists of a low circular mound which originally covered a small square stone cist (box) and surrounded by a circle of upright stones and drystone walling.

The site is unfortunately incomplete as the cist was removed from the centre of the mound during investigations in 1914 and re-erected in the grounds of La Hougue Bie Museum, Grouville. Two pottery vessels were found in the cist, one of which contained cremated remains, apparently of an adult and child.