

## Research article

# The politics of early Neolithic connectivity: Relations between Britain and Ireland

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### Abstract

While recent aDNA and other scientific analysis has served to underline the recurrent role of migration in the process of Neolithisation right across Europe, there remains plenty of scope for better integration of archaeogenetic and archaeological interpretations and for detailed narratives of local and regional trajectories. This paper focuses on relations between Britain and Ireland in the early Neolithic, in the first part of the 4th millennium cal BC. I argue that direct connections between Britain and Ireland have been overlooked and underplayed — hidden in plain sight — in the search for perceived common sources in continental Europe. I advance four propositions for debate: that the first Neolithic people in Ireland came mainly from Britain, perhaps from several parts of western Britain; that subsequent connections, long described but curiously not much further interpreted, constitute an intense set of interactions; that such links were probably spread over time through the early Neolithic, coming thick and fast near the beginning and perhaps even intensifying with time; and that such relations were maintained and intensified because of the concentrated circumstances of beginnings. The latter arguably contrast with those of the relationship between the Continent and southern Britain. The maintenance of connections was political, because a remembered past was actively used; lineage founders, concentrated lineages and other emergent social groupings may have developed through time as part of such a process.

**Keywords:** Britain; Ireland; early Neolithic; migration; colonisation; connectivity; politics; tempo; aDNA

(Received 4 October 2024; accepted 21 February 2025)

### Going over: the next steps?

Long archaeological debate about the process of Neolithisation across Europe, going back to the nineteenth century, seems now finally to have been settled. Whether migrants were responsible for the introduction into Europe of a new way of life involving agriculture and a more settled existence, or whether this transition was in the hands of indigenous European hunter-gatherers themselves, using knowledge of new techniques and practices diffused from centres of innovation in the Near East, had been the big questions. Ancient DNA (aDNA) studies (Reich 2018; and other references below), supported by earlier isotopic investigations (for example Price *et al.* 2001; Schulting & Richards 2002), appear at last to have sorted the major outlines of processes of Neolithisation. Virtually everywhere across Europe, including in regions where there were very respectable archaeological arguments in favour of a significant involvement for indigenous people if not indeed

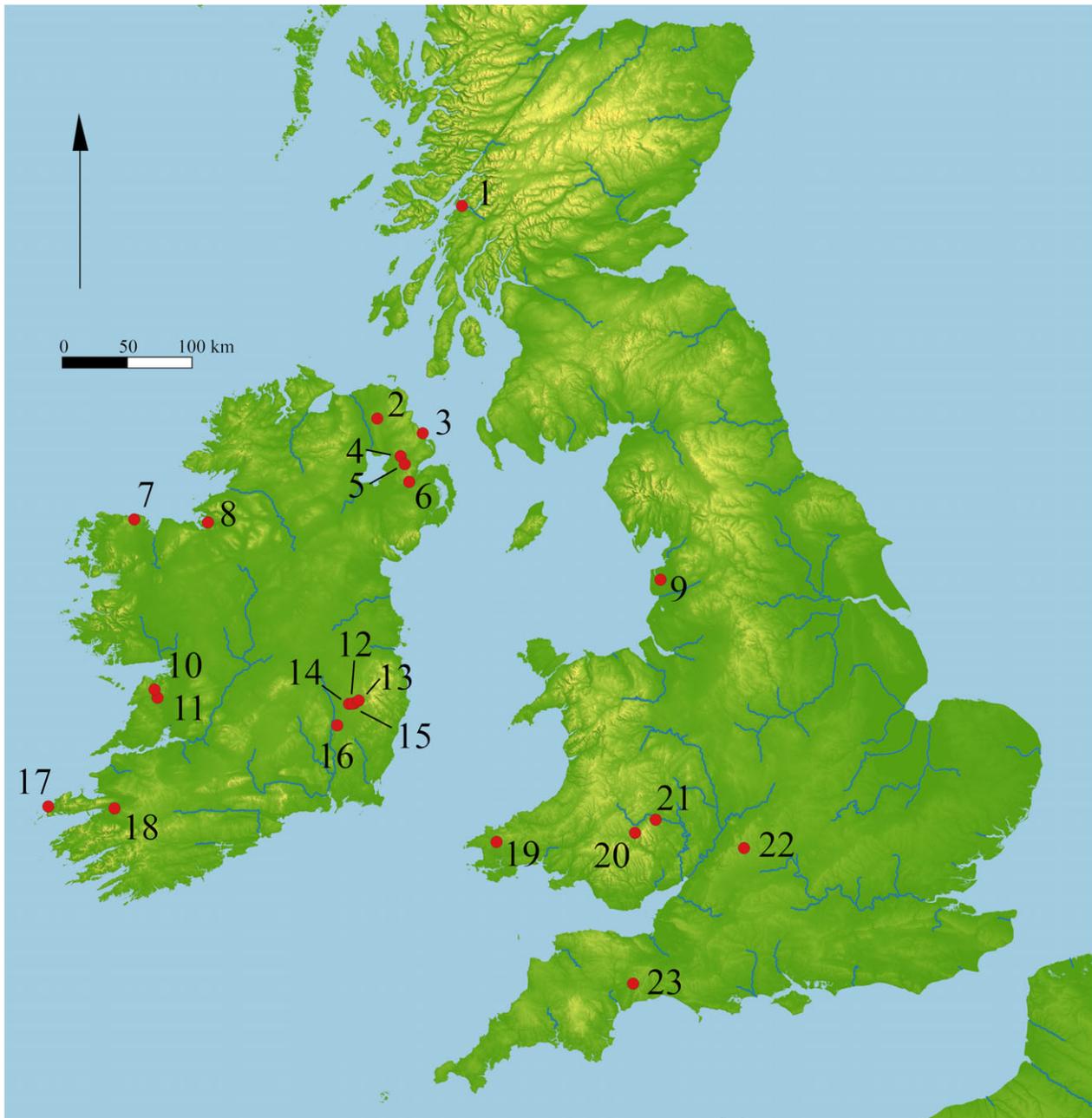
a leading role (eg Allentoft *et al.* 2024), it now seems that incomers ultimately of Near Eastern genetic ancestry were principally responsible for the introduction of the new way of life.

That said, my aim in this paper is to argue that there is still considerable scope for further and better integration of archaeological and archaeogenetic results and for the continuing interrogation of the fine detail, region by region, of the revised and emerging big picture described above. I suggest that this may reveal much about the nature of migration and the varying conditions of the initial establishment of Neolithic settlement across Europe. It may also inform us on the possible contribution to change of indigenous people, though that is not my principal focus here.

I concentrate here on relations between Britain and Ireland in the early Neolithic (Figure 1). I argue that for varying reasons the specific relationship between Britain and Ireland at the start of the Neolithic has tended to be overlooked — hidden in plain sight — in wider searches for continental origins and broader processes, and that more remains to be done to interpret the evident connections between the two islands once Neolithic lifeways had been

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**Cite this article:** Whittle A. (2025). The politics of early Neolithic connectivity: Relations between Britain and Ireland. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ppr.2025.3>



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|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Achnacreebeag   | 6 Lyles Hill    | 11 Parknabinnia     | 16 Linkardstown    | 21 Dorstone Hill  |
| 2 Ballymacaldrack | 7 Ballyglass    | 12 Rathcoran        | 17 Ferriter's Cove | 22 Hazleton North |
| 3 Ballygalley     | 8 Magheraboy    | 13 Spinans Hill     | 18 Killaclohane    | 23 Hembury        |
| 4 Donegore        | 9 Windy Harbour | 14 Hughstown        | 19 Garn Turne      |                   |
| 5 Dunmurry        | 10 Poul nabrone | 15 Baltinglass Hill | 20 Penywyrlod      |                   |

**Fig. 1.** Specific sites mentioned or discussed in the text.

established in both. With advances in chronological resolution and scientific analysis, not least of aDNA, we are in a stronger position to attempt more ambitious historical approaches to early Neolithic connectivity across the Irish Sea. I deliberately offer a generalised characterisation of the vast literature, and from that develop three propositions about the nature and trajectory of change. That takes us into

the realm of early Neolithic politics, using that term as a summary of differing aspects of social relations; useful definitions are to be found in Paul Sillitoe (2010, 13: 'when we go beyond accounts of technology or subsistence activities to how these relate to the wider social order, we invariably find ourselves considering political matters too'), and in Daniela Hofmann *et al.* (2024, 23: 'the term politics refers to

**Table 1.** Summary of some of the key elements of a possible chronology for selected aspects of the early Neolithic in Britain and Ireland, subject to ongoing and future modelling

Date	Starts and processes
Later 5th mill cal BC	Phase of enhanced or 'bow-wave' contacts (one- or two-way?), including Ferriter's Cove, Bexhill flints, Maerdy post, Achnacreebeag pot. Michelsberg/northern Chasséen etc. expansion (including enclosures), in area where aDNA could suggest most dense contacts with Britain and Ireland.
41st century cal BC onwards	Start Neolithic things and practices in SE Britain, according to models in Whittle <i>et al.</i> 2011 (subject to revision by <i>Gathering Time</i> /GT 2.0). Time-transgressive spread to W and N (subject to revision by GT 2.0); revised estimates already for Wales and NW England, back to 39th or even 40th century cal BC.
41st–39th centuries cal BC	For some, 'minimal' earliest Neolithic in southern Britain. Founder lineages? First monuments (details in Whittle <i>et al.</i> 2011). Start ENI in Ireland proposed at c. 4000 cal BC, but uncertain presence till ?late 39th century cal BC.
38th century cal BC onwards	Start ENII in Ireland c. 3800/3750 cal BC. Portal tombs from c. 3800 cal BC. More visible signs of agriculture in both Ireland and Britain. In Britain, more frequent building of barrows and other constructions related to/involving the dead, and surge in material connections and innovations. Court tombs in Ireland and Clyde cairns in W Scotland from c. turn of 38th/37th centuries cal BC.
37th century cal BC	Rapid spread of enclosures in S Britain from late 38th century cal BC. Simple earliest forms then more complex subsequently. Some kind of ancestral connection with N France? Date of Irish examples conforms with British pattern? Irish house horizon centred in 37th century cal BC. First (simpler) passage tombs in Ireland? Regional decorated pottery styles in S Britain.
36th century cal BC	MN in Ireland from c. 3600 cal BC. Peak of enclosure use in Britain, and archaising forms of burial monuments. Linkardstown burials in Ireland and single burials in England (such as Duggleby Howe). First cursus monuments in Britain; chronology for Irish enclosures yet to be established. Regional decorated pottery styles in Ireland and W Scotland? Beginnings of shifts/decline in agriculture??

negotiating between different, possibly diverging, conflicting or mutually opposed interests, values and worldviews of individuals or groups, and to how decisions are made and executed'). That leads to a fourth proposition, about the conditions in which close relations between Britain and Ireland developed and were maintained. Overall, in selectively covering themes of the circumstances of pioneering Neolithic settlement, the nature of the first Neolithic activity including here principally monuments or constructions, and political and social dimensions of early Neolithic connectivity, roughly from the 41st to the 37th and 36th centuries cal BC (Table 1), and with a recurrent interest in matters of scale, I hope to explore questions of parallel interest for many other regions beyond Britain and Ireland (see eg Hofmann *et al.* 2024).

#### Under-interpreted connections between Britain and Ireland

##### *An old debate resolved, at one scale?*

There is by now a vast literature on the themes of the Neolithisation of Britain and Ireland from the European continent, the monuments and material culture of the early Neolithic of these offshore islands, and the western seaways (out of much longer lists, see Cooney 2000; Callaghan and

Scarre 2009; Sheridan 2010; Anderson-Whymark & Garrow 2015; Cummings 2017; Bradley 2019; Smyth *et al.* 2020; Cummings *et al.* 2022; Cooney 2023; Hofmann *et al.* 2024). It is also worth remembering debate about the extent to which the Irish Mesolithic was connected to the wider world (O'Kelly 1989; Sheridan 2004; 2007; 2010; Woodman 2015; Cassidy *et al.* 2020; Warren 2022); I have discussed elsewhere the range of possible 'bow-wave' contacts between the Continent and Britain and Ireland in the later fifth millennium cal BC (Whittle 2024a; 2025).

At one scale, thanks above all to aDNA analysis as noted above, the long debate about the nature of the Neolithisation of Britain and Ireland is now seemingly resolved as part of the big story about the migration of people of ultimately Near Eastern ancestry and the appearance of such incomers in almost every part of Europe (Cassidy *et al.* 2016; Reich 2018; Brace *et al.* 2019; Cassidy *et al.* 2020; Rivollat *et al.* 2020; Brace & Booth 2023; Cassidy 2023; Booth 2025). It is also hard to think of any category of early Neolithic material culture, monumentality and settlement on either side of the Irish Sea that has not been thoroughly discussed (see, among many others, Cooney 2000; Cummings 2017; Bradley 2019; Cooney 2023).

These investigations are framed by increasingly robust and precise chronological narratives (Whittle *et al.* 2011;

Schulting *et al.* 2012; McClatchie & Potito 2020; Sheridan & Schulting 2020; Smyth *et al.* 2020; Griffiths 2021). It is important, however, to acknowledge remaining questions about the detail of the sequences in both Britain and Ireland. There are still rival models for process and timing (Table 1), for example from the multi-strand scenarios of Alison Sheridan to the kind of spread proposed in *Gathering Time* (eg Sheridan 2010; Whittle *et al.* 2011; Ray & Thomas 2018; Sheridan & Schulting 2020; Sheridan & Whittle 2023). Julian Thomas (2022) has proposed a minimal set of activities in the earliest Neolithic in Britain, later reinforced by continuing migration streams from the Continent, the consolidation of settlement and the establishment of a full agricultural economy (cf. Griffiths 2018); that remains to be worked out in detail, as there are signs that Neolithic activity including clearance and cereal cultivation could go back to the 40th century cal BC in parts of western Britain (Griffiths 2021; Whittle 2024a; 2025). Remodelling of *Gathering Time* for England and Wales is planned, with hundreds of new radiocarbon dates collected (with Alex Bayliss and Frances Healy). Likewise, there remains plenty of uncertainty about the detailed chronology of the early stages of the Neolithic sequence in Ireland. Succeeding the complicated models mooted in *Gathering Time* (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapter 12), an ENI from c. 4000–3800/3750 cal BC is now proposed before an ENII, from c. 3800/3750–3600 cal BC (Whitehouse *et al.* 2014; McClatchie & Potito 2020; Smyth *et al.* 2020; Cooney 2023). By ENII, there is abundant evidence for settlement including the striking house horizon, clearance and cereal cultivation, and a range of monuments including portal tombs, court tombs and probably the first passage tombs, but activity in ENI is much harder to define and pin down reliably (Schulting *et al.* 2017; Smyth *et al.* 2020).

Despite such uncertainty, the resulting big picture for the offshore islands confirms the older, traditional view of incoming migrants, as expressed for example in the claim made over 60 years ago that ‘at some time there must have been an immigration of Neolithic farmers [...] into Ireland’ (Corcoran 1960, 124). People came into Britain and Ireland probably from northern France, and possibly in two or more strands, one westerly, one eastern; there seems to have been relatively little contribution from indigenous people to early Neolithic genetic signatures except in western Scotland (Cassidy *et al.* 2016; Brace *et al.* 2019; Cassidy *et al.* 2020; Rivollat *et al.* 2020; Cassidy 2023; Brace & Booth 2023; Sheridan & Whittle 2023; Booth 2025; note reservations in Thomas 2022). It is probable that these new arrivals considerably outnumbered the local populations (Brace & Booth 2023; Cassidy 2023; Booth 2025), though we do not need to deny the latter all sense of agency and involvement in processes of change, and I have argued elsewhere that indigenous knowledge of landscape and its resources may have been of an importance out of proportion to contribution to genetic signatures (Whittle 2024a, 6; 2025, 117; cf. Cooney 2023, 108). The most detailed and extensive formal chronological modelling so far proposed a ‘time-transgressive’ process, beginning in south-east England in the 41st century cal BC, with progressive spread westwards and northwards (Whittle *et al.* 2011; subsequent models are noted

below). Overall, for both Britain and Ireland, it seems to me appropriate to envisage a comprehensive Neolithic takeover by colonisation, even if we should be careful not to import all manner of modern, negative connotations of that term (cf. Crellin 2020, 10–12; Gori & Abar 2023).

### *The range of specific connections: growing possibilities*

Moving to a tighter scale than that of the overall big picture for the offshore islands within the context of changes in north-west Europe, close connections in the early Neolithic between Britain and Ireland have long been recognised. That goes at least as far back as the generation of Stuart Piggott, whose masterly synthesis (1954) included the concept of the Clyde-Carlingford culture, based on the evident similarities between Clyde cairns in western Scotland and court tombs principally in the northern portion of Ireland (cf. Corcoran 1960; de Valera 1960; and see below).

The list of probable and possible connections and similarities on either side of the Irish Sea, however, is now much longer (Cooney 2000, 224–7; Sheridan 2004, 13; Cooney 2007, 549). It includes, variously: portal tombs (Kytmanow 2008; Mercer 2015; Cummings & Richards 2021); other cairns including court tombs and Clyde cairns (Schulting *et al.* 2012; Sheridan & Schulting 2020); non-megalithic mortuary structures (Sheridan 1995, 5; Cooney 2000, 225); enclosures (Cooney 2007, 549; Whittle *et al.* 2011; 2024; O’Driscoll 2024); pottery including carinated bowl (formerly labelled as Western Neolithic and Neolithic A) and some of the repertoire of decorated bowls found in both western Scotland and Ireland (Case 1961; Sheridan 1995); lithics including flint leaf-shaped and lozenge arrowheads (Case 1963, 6), Arran pitchstone and Antrim flint (Cooney 2000, 225); and porcellanite axes from north-east Ireland found in Scotland and England, and Group VI and other axes found in Ireland (Cooney 2000, 188, 204, fig. 6.16). To this can also be added cave burials on either side of the Irish Sea (Dowd 2015; Peterson 2019; Schulting 2020; Cooney 2023). In later phases, beyond the principal focus of this paper, there are also potentially striking similarities in the distribution of individualised burials in round barrows and cairns in parts of northern England and Ireland (eg Gibson & Bayliss 2009; Cooney 2023, for the Linkardstown type), and indeed of cursus monuments (Cooney 2000, 165–6, 169; O’Driscoll 2024; cf. Bradley 2024).

As already noted, recent aDNA analysis has had a key role in resetting the big picture. Common, shared origins in continental Europe for new population in both Britain and Ireland have been one recurrent focus of discussion, with northern France regularly proposed as the nearest and most likely source area (Brace & Booth 2023; Cassidy 2023; Booth 2025; see also Hofmann *et al.* 2024, chapter 3). Further detail remains elusive, and the lack of samples from Brittany is still an obstacle to better understanding (Cassidy 2023, 160); nonetheless aDNA samples from late Mesolithic contexts there give some ground for optimism about future investigations (Simões *et al.* 2024). But as well as helping to consolidate the big picture, aDNA analysis has also established an almost identical genetic signature for the

early Neolithic populations of both Britain and Ireland. There are now indications of some direct if fairly distant genetic (perhaps family) connections across the Irish Sea revealed through identity-by-descent analysis and possible evidence for continuing intermarriage across the Irish Sea, in contrast to a seeming lack of comparable evidence across the English Channel (Brace & Booth 2023, 137, 143). The suggestion has also been made of ‘patrilineal affiliations between high-status men that stretched back many generations in time’ (Cassidy 2023, 160–1; see also Booth 2025).

### *Two remaining gaps in coverage and interpretation of the nature of connectivity*

All this represents considerable progress (with suitable caveats about enduring uncertainties). Yet, looking over the extensive literature, I see two very significant gaps in coverage and interpretation.

First, nearly all recent syntheses and discussions of the initial Neolithisation of Britain and Ireland tend to talk in rather general terms about derivation from probably common or shared areas of origin on the European continent, and to swerve around the sharper question of the relationship between Britain and Ireland in this process. That can be seen both in wider syntheses and discussions (eg Cummings 2017; Ray & Thomas 2018; Bradley 2019; Cooney 2000; Harris 2021; Cummings *et al.* 2022; Cooney 2023; Hofmann *et al.* 2024) and in the outputs of specific projects concerned with topics such as the western seaways (eg Callaghan & Scarre 2009; Garrow & Sturt 2011; Anderson-Whymark & Garrow 2015; Garrow & Sturt 2017; Garrow *et al.* 2017) or particular kinds of monuments (eg Kytmanow 2008; Mercer 2015; Sheridan & Schulting 2020). For example, although there is a long history of writing about the western seaways from the later nineteenth century into the 1930s, documented in detail by Richard Callaghan and Chris Scarre (2009, with references), and supplemented by further considerations of currents and sea conditions (eg Davies 1946; Case 1969a; Bowen 1970; McGrail 1997; Cooney 2004; Bradley 2019, 19–24; 2022; see also Bradley 2023), all of which discuss the challenges of sea travel and the possibilities of successful connection by and across water, the principal focus has nearly always been on the general link between the Continent and the offshore islands of Britain and Ireland. This can be seen in a summary figure from the excellent work on the western seaways by Hugo Anderson-Whymark and Duncan Garrow (2015, fig. 5.5), who usefully ‘re-image’ continental connections between 5000 and 3500 cal BC. Up to six spheres of interaction are posited and mapped. Two (nos 2 and 3) include the Irish Sea respectively in part and as a whole, and a third (no. 6) impinges on its southernmost part, but there is no sphere directly addressing the central or northern parts of the Irish Sea itself. *Gathering Time* (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapters 12, 14 and 15) has addressed this more directly in recent times (though see also Garrow *et al.* 2017), but even that tends only to hint at possibilities (such as mapped in Whittle *et al.* 2011, figs 14.177 and 15.8) and does not enter into extended or locally detailed discussion of the implications (see further below). To my knowledge, only Neil

Carlin and Gabriel Cooney (2020, 332) have explicitly recognised a contrast between continental and intra-insular contacts, writing (albeit briefly) that ‘past interactions between continental Europe and Ireland or Britain are often considered from a present-day perspective to be much more significant than insular contacts. This is especially the case if they involved the movement of people with slightly different genes, even if these involved much shorter journeys such as those across the English Channel to northern France’.

One has to go back to older treatments (eg Childe 1946; Piggott 1954; Corcoran 1960; Case 1963; 1969b; see also Sheridan 1995; Cummings & Fowler 2004) to find useful, detailed and sustained accounts (whatever other flaws there may have been in pre-processual, culture historical approaches) which actually address Irish Sea connectivity head-on. Setting the scene, and borrowing from Bronislaw Malinowski, Gordon Childe (1946, 36; cf. Garrow & Sturt 2011) evoked in a celebrated phrase ‘grey waters [...] bright with Neolithic argonauts’ in discussing the western seaways of Britain. Stuart Piggott had earlier (1934, 376) written about ‘complex infiltrations of small groups of people at various points along our coast’, and in his wider synthesis (Piggott 1954) envisaged the arrival into Ireland of early agricultural colonists using pottery of the ‘Western’ family tradition, including an early influx from north-east England, along with non-megalithic funerary architecture and Grimston-Lyles Hill pottery (now labelled as carinated bowl). He also proposed a later influx of court tomb builders coming from south-west Scotland and even imagined (Piggott 1954, 151) the people of his proposed Clyde-Carlingford culture as having set off originally from the Pyrenees. I have already noted the view of John Corcoran (1960, 124) that the origins of ‘Neolithic A’ pottery — the carinated bowl tradition — were to be found outside Ireland.

Humphrey Case, well-known for his wider essay on Neolithisation including the practicalities of sea travel, scouting, pioneering and initial establishment (1969a), also wrote in detail about connections between Britain and Ireland (1963; 1969b), having previously examined the Irish Neolithic pottery sequence (1961). He began with the assumption that ‘Western Neolithic’ pottery in Ireland was introduced ‘from overseas’ (Case 1961, 200), suggesting that it was commonsense to look for the origins of his Dunmurry style (now seen as part of the carinated bowl tradition: Sheridan 1995) in Brittany (Case 1961, 222). By the time of his next paper, he saw the best parallels for that component in the Grimston ware of the Yorkshire Wolds, with the question of overall origins being left open (Case 1963, 4, 8); he also noted very similar leaf and lozenge arrowheads throughout Britain and Ireland. In his last paper on this theme, focused on the north of Ireland, his narrative had sharpened. While seeing ‘the whole of Atlantic Europe accessible from northern Ireland to those engaged in seasonal movements’ (Case 1969b, 7), he regarded the close lithic resemblances, particularly in arrowhead forms, as showing ‘close relatives in England’ (Case 1969b, 10) and concluded that the ‘earliest settlers in north Ireland are more likely to have come from or through the Wolds, than elsewhere in the British Isles or continent of Europe’ (Case 1969b, 11). In her useful

refinement of Case's pottery scheme for Ireland, Alison Sheridan developed things a little further, contrasting an early phase of carinated bowl pottery (cf. Herne 1988) 'of the same type as that seen over much of Britain' (Sheridan 1995, 17) with a following phase of modification and diversification (1995, 6). Her treatment of carinated bowl pottery in her subsequent series of papers on strands of Neolithisation in Britain and Ireland (eg Sheridan 2004; 2007; 2010) strongly implies derivation from Britain, but she has not pursued those specific links in further detail and seems to explain similarity in material culture again by shared continental ancestry (Sheridan 2004, 9). She did, however, note probable later connections with western Scotland (Sheridan 1995, 6; cf. Sheridan 2016) and the possible resemblance of some pottery in the north of Ireland to the Hembury style of south-west England (Sheridan 1995, 17).

The second significant gap in the literature which I see is that, while syntheses and discussions have recognised the many possible connections between Britain and Ireland after initial Neolithisation (eg Corcoran 1960, 134; Cooney 2000, 225; Cummings & Fowler 2004; Cooney 2007, 549), rather little has been done with interpretation of these beyond basic description and identification; much more could be done with the sociality and politics of connectivity (Figure 2). For example, Gabriel Cooney (2000, 14) recognised 'the strong links to ceremonial traditions in northern Britain' of the wooden mortuary structure at Ballymacaldrack, Co. Antrim and 'international styles of pottery, linking Britain and Ireland' (Cooney 2000, 184); he also refers to 'hands across the sea' in the material links between north-east Ireland and south-west Scotland, and 'a sense of shared identity' (Cooney 2000, 224–5), and has suggested that inhabitants of places like Ballygalley in Co. Antrim 'could have perceived themselves as embedded in a social context that stretched across the Irish Sea' (Cooney 2000, 227; see also Cooney 2004); at the same time, he has cautioned against assuming a single identity in early Neolithic Ireland (Cooney 2007, 552). These are all highly valuable observations, but they are not developed into a wider account of Irish Sea connectivity. Recent aDNA papers come closest to broadening the discussion, with, as noted above, suggestions of similar origins and continuing intermarriage (Cassidy 2023, 153, 160–1; Brace & Booth 2023, 137; Booth 2025), but even these are comparatively limited in discussing possible implications. None of the recent accounts I have so far cited appears to put either observations or consequences into a wider or more detailed narrative.

It is interesting to speculate why this has been and seems to continue to be the case. Perhaps there have been a number of factors at work. An older generation of scholars was more comfortable with specific, historical explanations, especially when it came to questions of origins (cf. Hodder 1987). And then there are all manner of modern (and not so modern) political sensitivities about relations between Britain and Ireland, from The Troubles right through to the current post-Brexit situation and issues to do with customs borders. In such a context, perhaps it is understandable that, consciously or unconsciously, researchers have avoided detailed issues of origins, derivation and connectivity (cf. Cooney 2001).

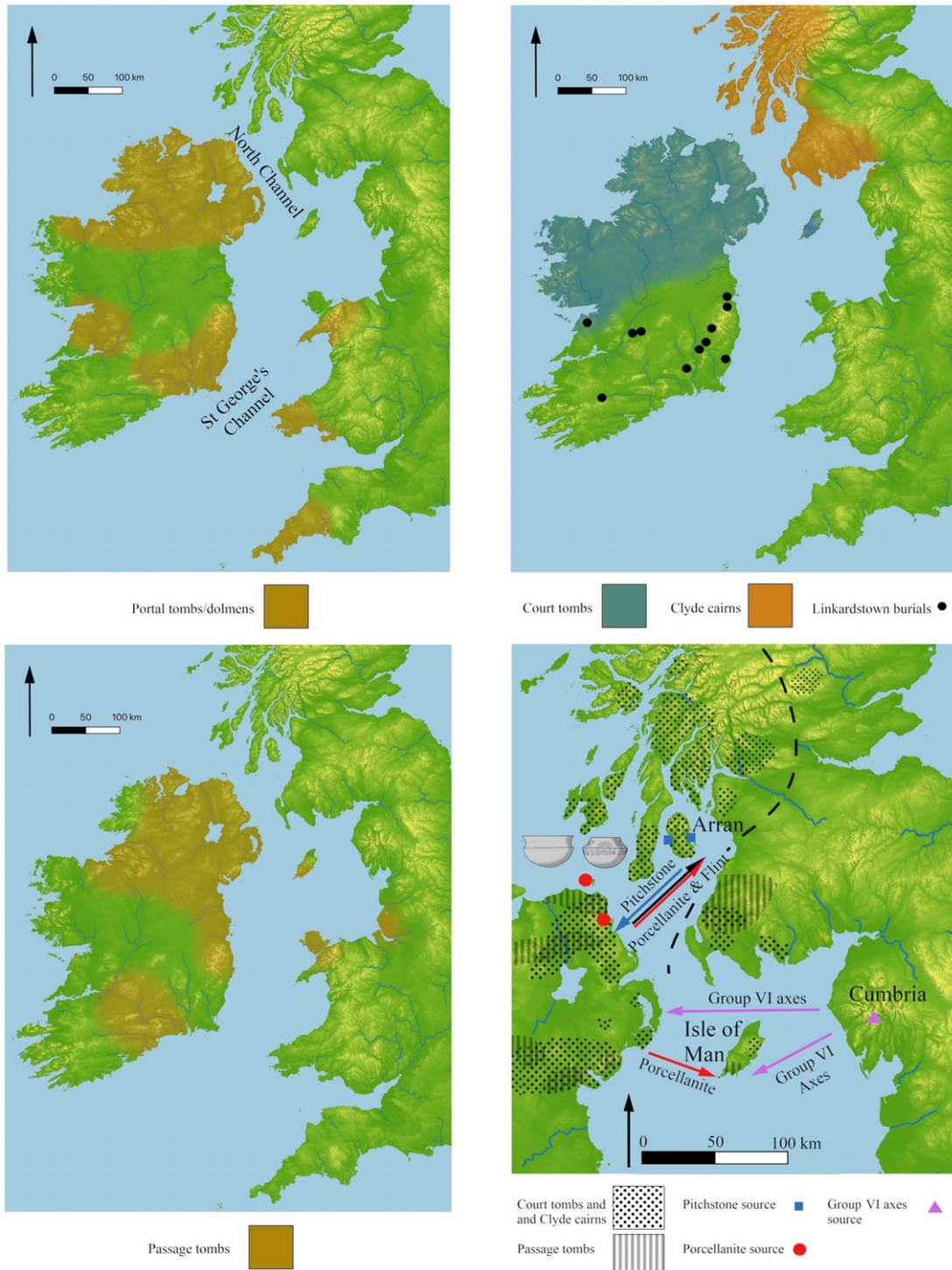
So in the rest of this deliberately speculative paper, I want to consider how the two gaps I have identified are to be closed in future research. Definitive models are not yet possible, with further chronological modelling to be done and more aDNA analysis to be carried out. I want to explore therefore what possible answers to come might look like. I advocate the need for a more detailed, contextual and historical approach than found in many recent accounts (as also argued by Hofmann *et al.* 2024), and I will try to outline the potential contribution which more ambitious narratives of the politics and sociality of the connectivity between Britain and Ireland could make to our understanding of the early Neolithic on either side of the Irish Sea. I will also attempt to link the two claimed gaps, arguing that intense connectivity across the Irish Sea in the early Neolithic was rooted in the circumstances of the initial relationship between Britain and Ireland in the process of Neolithisation. I offer four propositions for debate.

## Notes towards a narrative of Irish Sea connectivity in the early Neolithic

### Beginnings

With all this in mind, my first proposition is that the bulk of initial Neolithic communities came to Ireland via Britain. This is based on chronological priority, reinforced by shared material culture, and now backed up by aDNA analyses.

While all chronological models can benefit from revision (Table 1 and discussion above), the most extensive previous estimates suggest that the earliest incoming Neolithic communities in Britain and Ireland were in the south-east of England, probably in the 41st century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapter 14). *Gathering Time* envisaged a time-transgressive process of subsequent spread to the west and north, perhaps accelerated by the 39th century cal BC by fusion with indigenous people (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 862). Its models, based on the dates available at the time, indicated that the Neolithisation of south-west England, the Isle of Man, southern and north-east Scotland, and Ireland, occurred more or less at the same time in the later 39th century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 862, figs 14.176–7). Its preferred model 3 for Ireland (for full details, see Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapters 12 and 14) suggested that the start of the Irish Neolithic fell in the later 39th–earlier 38th century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 663, fig. 12.57). With more dates available, these models cannot be regarded as stable. Estimates for the start of Neolithic activity in north-west England, based on a series of occupation sites investigated and modelled since *Gathering Time*, now go back to the later 40th and earlier 39th centuries cal BC (Griffiths 2021, 36, fig. 3.3); other sites since investigated, such as Windy Harbour, Lancashire (Fraser Brown, *pers. comm.*), will contribute importantly to the refinement of such estimates. Likewise, estimates for the start of Neolithic activity in south Wales and the Marches can be pushed back to the 39th century cal BC (Griffiths 2022; cf. Ray *et al.* 2023), and further dates from sites in Cornwall are likely also to entail revision of start dates in this region (Jones & Quinnell 2021; Whittle 2024a; 2025).



**Fig. 2.** Some of the connections and similarities in early Neolithic practices across the Irish Sea. Distributions to left, top right and bottom left principally after Cooney (2001; 2023) and Kytmanow (2008). Bottom right redrawn after Cooney (2000, fig. 7.3).

Meanwhile in Ireland, as already noted, there has emerged a division of the early Neolithic into an ENI, from c. 4000–3800/3750 cal BC, and an ENII, from c. 3800/3750–3600 cal BC (Whitehouse *et al.* 2014; McClatchie & Potito 2020; Smyth *et al.* 2020), with one account noting an almost ‘invisible’ presence in ENI (Smyth *et al.* 2020, 428, 432). Such a scheme is compatible with the preferred model 3 of *Gathering Time*, and

can accommodate the now preferred chronological interpretation of deposition at Poul nabrone, Co. Clare, beginning around 3800 cal BC (Lynch 2014, and see below; *Gathering Time* had taken a different line on that monument) and probably early 38th-century activity at Baltinglass Hill, Co. Wicklow (Schulting *et al.* 2017; see also Smyth *et al.* 2020, 432); another portal tomb at Killaclohane II, Co. Kerry, could belong to the

38th century cal BC based on finds and a single radiocarbon date (Connolly 2021). We must also set aside the allegedly early date for the Magheraboy enclosure in Co. Sligo of around 4000 cal BC, which had exercised us so much in *Gathering Time*, since recent remodelling with different assumptions about the age of wood samples suggests revised probabilities in line with those for other enclosures (Whittle *et al.* 2024, fig. 4). In the same way, it still seems wise to set aside the claims for an early, Atlantic or Breton strand up the west side of Britain and potentially involving Ireland (Sheridan 2004; 2007; 2010; 2016; Sheridan & Schulting 2020). If the Achnacreebeag pot, for example, is not to be seen as in a regional tradition of decorated pottery in western Scotland, it could still be accommodated as one of a series of 'bow-wave' contacts with the Continent (as noted above), including the episode at Ferriter's Cove (Woodman 2015; Whittle 2024a; 2025), and I think it is telling that there is no similar material from the many recent road schemes in Ireland (Carlin & Cooney 2017; and references below).

Thus, we can formalise the proposition that the earliest Neolithic in Ireland was not only later than first activity in Britain, including in western Britain, but was also in the hands of people who principally came from Britain. That is to reinstate, in modified form, the arguments of Stuart Piggott and Humphrey Case as noted above, though without the need to invoke a specific route involving Yorkshire and north-east England. This seems to me to make sense of the long-agreed similarities in pottery and lithics alike and also of the close similarities in genetic signatures discussed above. Those are there in my view because this was essentially the same population on the move, engaged in probably multiple and regionalised migratory moves and the progressive intake of the whole of the offshore islands, in a process lasting probably, as far as the west of Britain and Ireland are concerned, from the 40th to the early 38th centuries cal BC.

### *Enduring and intensifying connections*

The long list of plausible connections between Britain and Ireland subsequent to initial Neolithisation has often been described, but here the challenge is to take interpretation further. Thus my second overall proposition is that cumulatively these connections mark a phase of considerable and potentially intensifying interaction, stemming from the conditions of initial colonisation. This may have involved varying participants and diverse connections in several directions, in contrast to the implied east–west movement of migration.

Firstly, it is worth emphasising yet again the range of possible and plausible connections between Britain and Ireland in the early Neolithic: not a unified set by any means but more concentrated and coherent than the connections between the European continent and the offshore islands (Carlin & Cooney 2020, 332), which have proved notoriously hard to track over more than a century of research on the beginnings of the Neolithic. They seem to involve practically every dimension of early Neolithic existence, from daily life and settlement to aspects of monumentality, mortuary customs and other social practices.

Secondly, and more specifically, there seem to be many interwoven themes at play. The movement of materials and finished products of for example porcellanite, Lakeland tuff, Antrim flint and Arran pitchstone project a general picture of considerable mobility, perhaps largely through what Humphrey Case (1969a) called 'seasonal mobility', some of it presumably representing gift and other exchanges, and some the stuff of daily life around and across the Irish Sea (Cooney 2004, 149). If individuals and small groups were regularly on the move between Britain and Ireland, they would presumably have found themselves in very familiar physical and social settings.

In this world, similar pottery and lithic styles could well have projected a common sense of origin and shared identity in daily life. Although the carinated bowl tradition was by no means unchanging (Sheridan 1995, 17; Whittle *et al.* 2011, 757–9, 824–8), it seems to have persisted through the Irish house horizon (eg Carlin & Cooney 2017; Johnston & Kiely 2019; Bayley & Delaney 2020; Long 2020; Moore 2021; Walsh 2021; Carlin 2024), and tellingly it is present in sites with houses in north-west Wales around 3700 cal BC (Kenney 2021). The time is surely ripe for a wider, fresh look at the carinated bowl tradition across Britain and Ireland (cf. Pioffet 2017). A sense of common identity might also have been projected through the use of similar rectangular houses on either side of the Irish Sea. There is an argument that large halls as found in lowland Scotland began earlier than the main Irish house horizon (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapters 12 and 14). Not all Irish houses need be understood in the same way, and their significance for patterns of daily life on the one hand and for special social significance on the other (Cross 2003; Smyth 2014) may have varied, but some of the larger and more prominent ones at least may have signalled wider connections, real and perceived, to Britain and beyond. Similarities in mortuary structures, enclosures, cave burials and even axe production in remote places may also have fostered differing senses of shared origins and identity, alongside local attachments, allegiances and ways of doing things (cf. Cooney *et al.* 2024); I explore aspects of mortuary structures and enclosures further below.

What Gabriel Cooney (2000, 224) called 'hands across the sea' could now also be sharpened further into patterns of intermarriage, as suggested by the aDNA interpretations noted above, and potentially diverse forms of kinship. Using Andrew Powell's (2005) and Chris Fowler's (2022) arguments that mortuary architecture may often have presented differing kinds of kinship and connections with the past, the array of wooden and stone mortuary structures could in general suggest varying kinship and other social links on either side of the Irish Sea. There are also important and varied differences here. Wooden mortuary structures are scarce (though so far a little more numerous in Scotland than in Ireland) compared to other forms of construction. Portal tombs or dolmens offer the closest resemblances in form and possible function on either side of the Irish Sea, some typological variations notwithstanding (Kytmanow 2008, fig. 5.28; Mercer 2015; Cummings & Richards 2021); the distribution in Britain is strongly weighted to west Wales and south-west England (Kytmanow 2008, fig. 9.1). The Clyde

cairn-court tomb linkage is by contrast oriented to the north-east of Ireland and the south-west of Scotland (Figure 2), and these architectural and mortuary traditions are closely similar but far from identical, though any participant in a funeral at one or other of these types of monument on either side of the Irish Sea would presumably have been familiar with the physical set-up: frontal area, receding or stacked chambers, and cairns. Portal tombs and court tombs within Ireland not only look different from one another but are placed differently in the landscape; and on this point we can learn much from earlier papers on these constructions (eg Davies 1946; Corcoran 1960; de Valera 1960; cf. Cooney 1979). Perhaps we can envisage social landscapes with local foci for particular lineages or other kin or social groupings (see Whittle 2024b) in the form of court tombs and Clyde cairns, signifying at one level one strand of origin focused on south-west Scotland and north-east Ireland, and other points of attention, in the form of portal tombs and dolmens, signalling another direction of connection and other concerns, following the arguments of Vicki Cummings and Colin Richards (2021; see also Cummings *et al.* 2022, 13) for dolmens as created places of awe and wonder in new landscapes; Garn Turne, Pembrokeshire, is a good example. Overall, there do not seem to be many hybrids bridging these two traditions, though there is some overlap (Kytmanow 2008, 60–9).

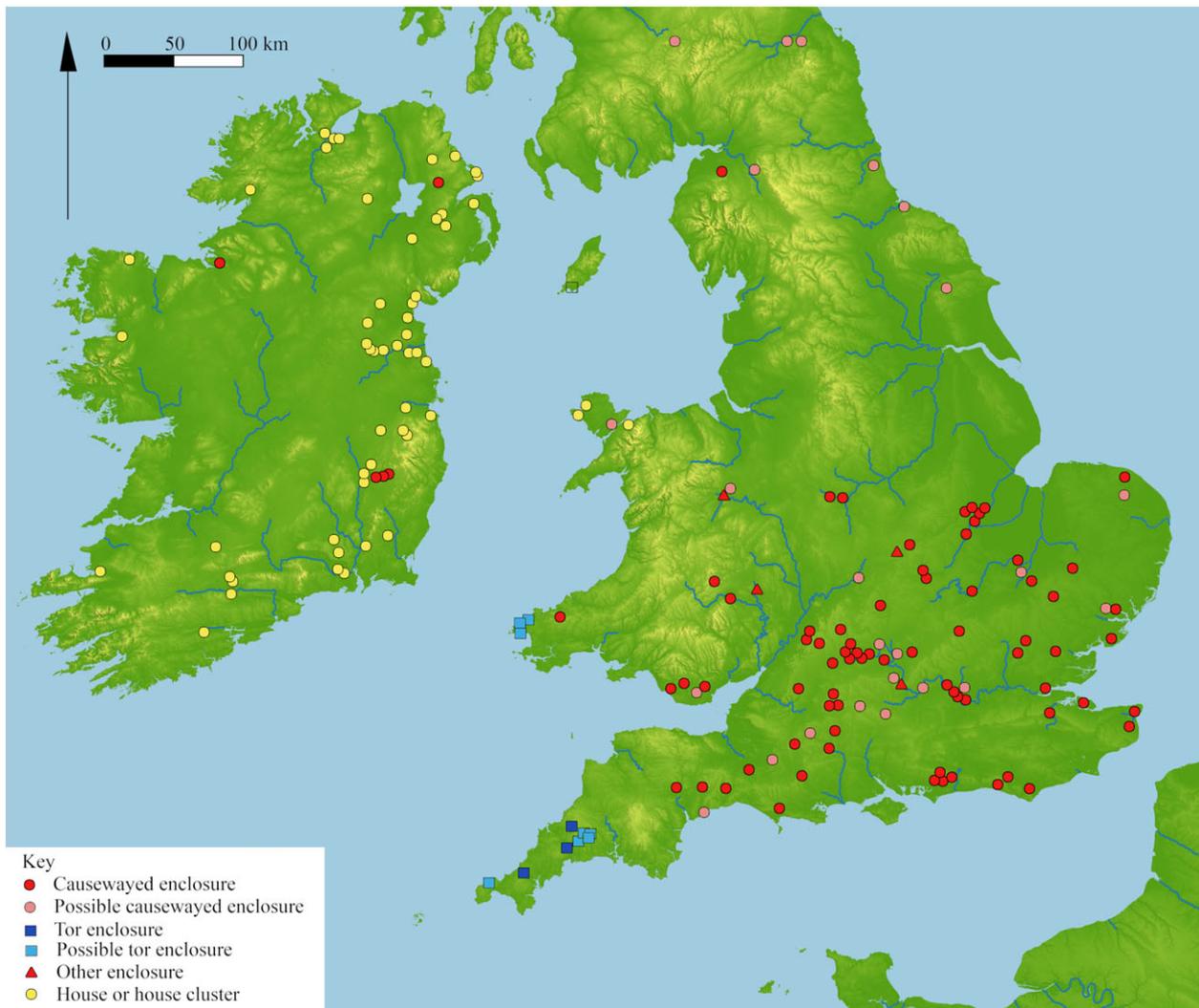
Enclosures offer another dimension and kind of potential connection. Previously, Magheraboy in Co. Sligo in the far west and Donegore in Co. Antrim in the north-east were the only known examples in Ireland (Danaher 2007; Mallory *et al.* 2011; Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapter 12). Now, upland surveys have shown the existence of other examples in eastern Ireland, including at Hughstown, Co. Kildare, and Spinans Hill 1 and Rathcoran, Co. Wicklow. These are hilltop enclosures, situated about 5 km apart in the Baltinglass area on the western side of the Wicklow Mountains. They are the subject of ongoing research by geophysical survey and excavation (O'Brien 2017; O'Brien & O'Driscoll 2017; Hawkes 2018; Whittle *et al.* 2024; O'Driscoll 2024; O'Driscoll *et al.* 2024; Gabriel Cooney, *pers. comm.*). Hughstown consists of four concentric enclosures, enclosing an area of 8.2 ha. Spinans Hill 1 is a single enclosure consisting of a low bank enclosing an area of about 11 ha. At Rathcoran, two closely spaced banks enclose a pear-shaped area of 10.02 ha.

These new sites, along with the already known features of Magheraboy and Donegore, seem to fit well with the general repertoire of enclosures in southern Britain, probably involving multiple communities (Edmonds 1999; Oswald *et al.* 2001; Whittle *et al.* 2011), and it is hard to resist the notion that these examples in Ireland were in some way inspired by practices in Britain, since that is the closest area with similar constructions of comparable date; those of northern France were both further away and not certainly still in use at the probable time of construction and use in Ireland (Dubouloz *et al.* 2023; Whittle *et al.* 2024). The known enclosures in Ireland are all relatively close to the coast. Within Britain, enclosures remain scarce north of mid-Wales and the English Midlands, though there are one or two outliers in north-west England and possible candidates in

southern Scotland (Oswald *et al.* 2001; Brophy 2004; Peterson 2021; Frodsham 2021; Oswald & Edmonds 2021). If there is a connection between Irish and British enclosures in the early Neolithic, it is thus tempting to look to southern Britain, where construction probably began in the late 38th century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2022; 2024), as the most likely source of inspiration for those built in Ireland. The southern British distribution extends to the Marches and southern Wales; many examples in those regions seem to be later than those to the east (Davis & Sharples 2017; Whittle *et al.* 2022), though Dorstone, Herefordshire, appears to be of 37th-century cal BC date (Ray *et al.* 2023). The Irish examples examined so far thus conform to the most recently modelled overall chronology for enclosures in Britain and Ireland as a whole (Whittle *et al.* 2024, fig. 4A).

A last aspect to put in the mix are the respective distributions of houses and enclosures across the Irish Sea. Houses appear more or less across the whole of Ireland, in the so-called 'house horizon' of the later 38th to the later 37th century cal BC (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapter 12; Smyth 2014; Smyth *et al.* 2020, 428). There is a marked cluster of new discoveries in north-west Wales (Kenney 2021). Other examples in western Britain are scattered from Cornwall to southern Scotland (Brophy 2007; Nowakowski & Johns 2015) and the Isle of Man (Bruce *et al.* 1947). Enclosures are concentrated principally across southern Britain, including in the Marches and south Wales (Whittle *et al.* 2022, fig. 13.1), with outliers in north-west England and Scotland as noted above. Put together, the two distributions are strikingly complementary (Figure 3). If their chronologies overlap (the house horizon in Ireland seeming to be a much shorter-lived phenomenon than enclosures), perhaps principally in the 37th century cal BC, could they represent some sort of equivalence in terms of sociality, such as an enhanced need or desire for larger gatherings and more prominent assertions of local, regional and other identities?

If all this deepens a sense of varied potential connections across the Irish Sea, then the future task remains of unpicking detailed histories of development. More modelling is required. Pending that, my third working proposition is that connections were established thick and fast near the start of the Irish sequence, in ENII, and may have intensified through time. Thus, the example of Poul nabrone (Lynch 2014) allows the presence of portal tombs from perhaps as early as c. 3800 cal BC; it seems very unlikely, however, that portal tombs are all this early. On the basis of present modelling, both Clyde cairns and court tombs appear to emerge at about the same time, from 3700 cal BC onwards (Schulting *et al.* 2012; Sheridan & Schulting 2020; cf. Cummings & Robinson 2015). At least one house underlies a court tomb in Ballyglass, Co. Mayo (Ó Nualláin 1972). Whether the central court tomb with its double set of chambers is of the earliest type is a moot question and it could be of 36th century cal BC date (Smyth 2020, 151), but on the slender basis of that one example, one could speculate whether some Irish houses preceded the first court tombs, just as seemingly halls in Scotland preceded the first Clyde cairns (Brophy 2007; Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapter 14; Sheridan & Schulting 2020). The Donegore enclosure in Co. Antrim probably dates to the later 38th or earlier 37th



**Fig. 3.** Respective distributions of sites of the house horizon in Ireland and enclosures in Britain (after Smyth 2014; Whittle *et al.* 2022). For details of further houses in western Britain, and enclosures in Ireland, see the main text.

century cal BC (Mallory *et al.* 2011; Whittle *et al.* 2011, figs 12.5–6; 2024), though it is unlikely to predate the first enclosures in southern Britain (Whittle *et al.* 2022) and perhaps therefore falls in the later part of its possible start span (noted above). As such, it may have preceded the bulk of houses in the Irish house horizon. Where other enclosures fall is an open question, as Magheraboy does not have to be early, and the more recent discoveries are yet to be precisely dated.

While there is still a lot to sort out and pin down, a working sequence for Ireland could start with the first portal tombs, to be followed by the first houses, and then coming thick and fast, the first Clyde cairns, court tombs and enclosures, and perhaps soon after the first passage tombs (not found in mainland Scotland, but perhaps with echoes in Hebridean tombs: Hensey 2015; cf. Henley 2004, 68–9). Although I have argued above for Neolithic people initially coming into Ireland from Britain, not all movement and connection need have been one-way. On distributional grounds alone, portal dolmens in Wales and south-west

England could be an offshoot of the greater numbers in Ireland (in a distant echo of de Valera's arguments (1960) for a west–east spread of court tombs), and one can remember here Alison Sheridan's suggestion (1995, 17) of Hembury ware in north-east Ireland; when the sequence comes in due course to decorated bowls (Case 1961; Sheridan 1995), directionality of influence across the North Channel is also an open question. Lastly, the priority of axe production is hard to establish on either side of the Irish Sea (Cooney 2000; Edinborough *et al.* 2020; Cooney *et al.* 2024) and early Neolithic cave use likewise may have begun at similar times, though there are some indications that the majority of Irish examples may be a little later than those in western Britain (Dowd 2015).

#### *The politics of beginnings and connections*

So far, I have advanced three propositions. The first is that the first Neolithic communities in Ireland came mainly via Britain, and presumably western Britain in particular. That

idea goes back to the generation of Stuart Piggott and Humphrey Case, but it has largely been lost sight of in recent searches for continental sources common to both Britain and Ireland. Recent aDNA analyses reveal more or less identical genetic signatures for Britain and Ireland. My second proposition is that subsequent connections seen in material culture and monumentality are evidence of intense interaction across the Irish Sea in the early Neolithic, even running on into the middle Neolithic in Irish terminology. Such links have often been listed, and recent aDNA analyses serve to enhance these with suggestions of intermarriage and ongoing contact. I argue, however, that this has been presented in an oddly matter-of-fact and muted way, and that much more could and should be made of it. My third proposition is that these connections were spread over time, though this requires further dating and more modelling, and as such may well have intensified through time.

Those claims enable my fourth proposition, that the close and arguably intensifying links seen in the course of the early Neolithic on either side of the Irish Sea were as they were *because of* the conditions of the initial spread of the Neolithic way of life through Britain and Ireland. That may establish an illuminating contrast with the process of the initial Neolithisation of southern Britain from the Continent. Though again subject to the need for further dating and revised modelling, the start of the Neolithic in Britain, on the basis of current evidence going back to south-east England in the 41st century cal BC, may have developed gradually, area by area (Whittle *et al.* 2011, chapters 14 and 15, with changes in models noted above). There have also been claims for some kind of minimal initial Neolithic presence in southern Britain (Griffiths 2018; Thomas 2022), though the details, such as the existence of cereal cultivation before 3800 cal BC, can be debated (Whittle 2024a; 2025). Though there are indications from both material culture similarities and aDNA analyses that Neolithic people may have come into southern Britain from northern France, it has been notoriously difficult over decades of research to pin down the whole range of possible continental sources for what came to be practised in Britain (Sheridan & Whittle 2023). This is further impeded by changing and potentially long-lasting ties in several directions; some even suggest possible contacts with and movements from and to southern Scandinavia, witnessed in the mutual presence of dolmens (Cummings *et al.* 2022). Arguably, more visible for the first time with a refined chronology and improved scientific analysis, that classic difficulty may have been so because of the gradual, time-progressive nature of the process of the Neolithisation of Britain, at a time of considerable change and realignment across the adjacent Continent (eg Praud *et al.* 2018; Dubouloz *et al.* 2023). In contrast to that putatively more strung-out process, I see what happened across the Irish Sea as faster and more concentrated, and because of the circumstances of beginnings in this context, active connections were important, and were maintained and even extended over succeeding generations.

Here come the politics of connectivity. Comparative migration theory predicts both the conditions of initial scouting and pioneering, and the recurrent existence of ongoing migration streams and connections back to original

homelands (eg Anthony 1997). The evidence in the case of Britain itself is mixed. Ancient DNA analysis so far suggests little by way of continuing migration from the Continent after initial Neolithisation (Brace & Booth 2023; Booth 2025), though isotope analysis has identified potential individual migrants (Neil *et al.* 2017; 2020); the introduction of enclosures into southern Britain at c. 3700 cal BC may also have evoked ancestral connections (Whittle *et al.* 2024). How could the contrasting situation across the Irish Sea be explained? The power of connection with the distant in strategies of achieving social prominence might be summoned (Helms 1988; 1998), but given the short distances and physical inter-visibility across the North Channel it is a moot point whether that applies convincingly in this case. The argument has frequently been made for an important role for lineage heads or founders (eg Ray & Thomas 2018; Fowler 2022), and kinship can be a significant force for cohesion and solidarity in contexts of migration (Carsten 2020). However, such evidence as we possess may suggest a different kind of trajectory.

There was a lack of close biological relatives in both the early portal tomb at Poul nabrone and the probably slightly later court tomb at Parknabinnia, leading the investigators to 'exclude small family groups as their sole proprietors and interpret our findings as the result of broader social differentiation with an emphasis on patrilineal descent' (Cassidy *et al.* 2020, 387). It is plausible that Penywyrldod in south-east Wales, probably dating from the 38th century cal BC onwards, also served a wide population, perhaps with multiple kinds of biological and social relationships, in a context of initial, pioneering inland settlement (Britnell & Whittle 2022). The kind of lineage shown by recent aDNA analysis at Hazleton North in the Cotswolds (Fowler 2022; Fowler *et al.* 2022) could have emerged through time (Whittle 2024b), and the same could be suggested, as a working hypothesis to be tested in future research, for many Clyde cairns and court tombs. Connections across the Irish Sea could have been intensified with time *because* emergent leading social groupings sought to make active use of a remembered history of beginnings, concentrated and intensive.

Within the now revised big picture of Neolithisation sketched at the beginning of this paper, I thus envisage different scenarios of change in different regions. What happened across the Straits of Dover and otherwise across the English Channel or North Sea was rather different to what took place across the North Channel and other parts of the Irish Sea, with an arguably slower tempo of change in the former case and a quicker and more intense transformation in the latter. I have argued that these led to the close connections across the Irish Sea, long observed but under-interpreted, and which are different to the history of subsequent connections between Britain and the Continent following initial colonisation. In virtually every sphere there are many remaining questions, but I have tried to make clear what we know (or think we know) and what we do not. I have advanced my four main propositions to help to frame continuing and future debate and research.

**Acknowledgements.** I am grateful above all to Gabriel Cooney for encouraging me to think about connectivity across the Irish Sea, and for

his critical comments. Richard Bradley, Mike Copper, Duncan Garrow, the editors and two anonymous referees also gave invaluable critique of an earlier draft of the paper. Grateful thanks also to Mike Copper for the figures.

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## RÉSUMÉ

**La politique de la connectivité au Néolithique ancien : les relations entre la Grande-Bretagne et l'Irlande**

Alors que de récentes études de l'ADN ancien et d'autres analyses scientifiques ont été utilisées afin de souligner le rôle récurrent de la migration dans le processus de la néolithisation de l'Europe, il reste encore de nombreuses possibilités de mieux intégrer les interprétations archéogénétiques et archéologiques et de proposer des descriptions plus précises des trajectoires locales et régionales. Cet article se concentre sur les relations entre la Grande-Bretagne et l'Irlande au Néolithique ancien, durant la première partie du 4<sup>e</sup> millénaire cal BC. J'estime que les connections directes entre la Grande-Bretagne et l'Irlande ont été négligées et minimisées – cachées sous nos yeux – dans une quête de ce qui a été perçu comme des sources communes en Europe continentale. Je fais quatre propositions ouvertes au débat : les premières populations néolithiques d'Irlande sont venues principalement de Grande-Bretagne, peut-être depuis plusieurs régions de l'ouest de la Grande-Bretagne ; les connections qui ont suivi, par ailleurs longuement décrites mais étrangement peu interprétées davantage, ont constitué un ensemble intense d'interactions ; ces liens se sont probablement étendus au cours du temps durant le Néolithique ancien, étant particulièrement nombreux au début et s'intensifiant sans doute avec le temps ; ces relations ont été maintenues et intensifiées en raison de la concentration des circonstances qui marque le début du Néolithique. Cette dernière proposition contraste sans doute avec celles mettant en avant des relations entre le continent et le sud de la Grande-Bretagne. Le maintien de connections était politique, car un passé commémoré était activement utilisé ; des fondateurs des lignées, des lignées concentrées et d'autres formes de regroupements sociaux émergents ont pu se développer au cours du temps dans le cadre de ce processus.

**Mots-clés :** Grande-Bretagne; Irlande; Néolithique ancien; migration; colonisation; connectivité; politique; tempo; ADN ancien

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

**Politische Aspekte früneolithischer Vernetzung: Beziehungen zwischen Großbritannien und Irland**

Während aktuelle aDNA- und andere naturwissenschaftliche Analysen die wiederkehrende Bedeutung von Migration im Prozess der Neolithisierung in ganz Europa unterstreichen, gibt es noch viel Raum für eine bessere Integration archäogenetischer und archäologischer Interpretationen und für detaillierte Narrative von lokalen und regionalen Entwicklungslinien. Dieser Beitrag fokussiert auf Beziehungen zwischen Großbritannien und Irland im frühen Neolithikum, im ersten Abschnitt des 4. Jahrtausends cal BC. Ich vertrete die Ansicht, dass direkte Verbindungen zwischen Großbritannien und Irland bei der Suche nach vermeintlichen gemeinsamen Ursprüngen in Kontinentaleuropa übersehen – sozusagen vor unseren Augen verborgen – und heruntergespielt wurden. Ich stelle vier Thesen zur Diskussion: dass die ersten neolithischen Menschen in Irland hauptsächlich aus

Großbritannien kamen, vielleicht aus verschiedenen Gebieten des westlichen Großbritanniens; dass nachfolgende Verbindungen, die bereits seit langem benannt, aber seltsamerweise nicht wirklich weiter erörtert wurden, sich als intensive Interaktionen darstellen; dass solche Vernetzungen im frühen Neolithikum durchgängig vorhanden sind, zu Beginn kraftvoll und schnell entstanden und sich möglicherweise im Laufe der Zeit intensivierten; und dass solche Beziehungen gerade aufgrund der konzentrierten Umstände ihrer Anfänge erhalten und intensiviert wurden. Letztgenannte Beziehungen stehen wohl im Gegensatz zu denjenigen zwischen dem Kontinent und Süd-Britannien. Das Aufrechterhalten der Verbindungen war politischer Natur, weil eine erinnerte Vergangenheit aktiv genutzt wurde; Gründer von Lineages, konzentrierte Lineages und andere entstehende soziale Gruppierungen können im Laufe der Zeit als Teil eines solchen Prozesses entstanden sein.

**Schlüsselbegriffe:** Großbritannien; Irland; Frühneolithikum; Migration; Kolonisation; Konnektivität; Politik; Geschwindigkeit; aDNA

## RESUMEN

**Las políticas de conectividad durante el neolítico inicial: relaciones entre Inglaterra e Irlanda**

Los recientes análisis de ADN y otros métodos científicos han señalado el recurrente papel de la migración en los procesos de neolitización a través de Europa, sin embargo, existen aún numerosos aspectos que requieren de una mejor integración entre las interpretaciones arqueogenéticas y arqueológicas para configurar narrativas detalladas de las trayectorias locales y regionales. Este artículo se centra en las relaciones entre Inglaterra e Irlanda durante el Neolítico inicial, en la primera parte del IV milenio cal BC. Se sostiene que las conexiones directas entre Inglaterra e Irlanda han sido obviadas y minimizadas -ocultadas a plena vista- en la búsqueda de aspectos comunes con la Europa continental. Se proponen cuatro consideraciones para debate: que las primeras ocupaciones neolíticas en Irlanda proceden fundamentalmente de Inglaterra, quizá de diversas partes del oeste de Inglaterra; que las conexiones subsecuentes, largamente descritas pero no interpretadas, constituyen un conjunto de intensas interacciones; que estas relaciones probablemente se expandieron durante el Neolítico inicial, estableciéndose de forma estrecha y rápida desde el inicio del Neolítico y quizá intensificándose con el tiempo; y que estas relaciones se mantuvieron e intensificaron debido a las circunstancias de sus inicios. Lo primero contrasta posiblemente con la relación entre el continente y el sur de Inglaterra. El mantenimiento de estas conexiones fue político, porque el pasado se usó de manera activa; los fundadores de linajes, los linajes concentrados y otros grupos sociales emergentes pudieron haberse desarrollado con el tiempo como parte de tal proceso.

**Palabras clave:** Inglaterra; Irlanda; Neolítico inicial; migración; colonización; conectividad; política; tempo; ADN antiguo