



THE
PREHISTORIC
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Trefignath
Megalithic tomb

Signposts to Prehistory

Location: Trefignath megalithic tomb (SH 2585 8056) is situated 2.4 km SSE of Holyhead, off the Parc Cybi road.

Main period: Neolithic

Access & ownership: Open 10am–4pm. The site is accessed from its own car park off the new road which runs from the roundabout south of Holyhead. Note: this new road is parallel to the old lane from which the site was once accessed.



Fig. 1. View of Trefignath towards Holyhead Mountain. By Robert Gladstone

Trefignath chambered tomb (Fig. 1) was the first prehistoric site on Anglesey to be recorded. In his *Monumenta Britannica*, the 17th century antiquary John Aubrey described “...great rude stones about 20 in number...The fashion of then can hardlie be exactlie described, by reason some are sunk deep & some fallen flat which are almost overgrown with earth & grass.” The structure was damaged further during the 18th and 19th centuries and the cairn that surrounded the stones was largely removed. The site was placed in state care in 1911. It was excavated in 1977–79, before being consolidated and restored for public viewing. Today the tomb is surrounded by modern developments and stands isolated from a nearby standing stone, Ty Mawr, with its strange twisted geology (SH 254 810).

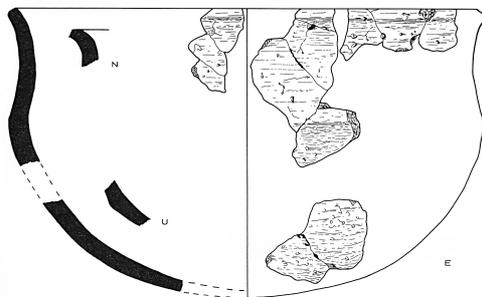


Fig. 2. Irish Sea Ware bowl from Trefignath. Illustration by permission of Cambrian Archaeological Association from Smith & Lynch 1987: fig. 35. Copyright reserved

The excavations (Smith & Lynch 1987) revealed hearths, flint tools and pottery immediately *beneath* the monument – evidence that the site had been occupied prior to the building of the tomb.

A total of 131 flint and chert artefacts were found scattered across this old ground surface and pottery sherds from undecorated bowls – Irish Sea Wares – of the early and middle Neolithic (Fig. 2). They are of a type used for domestic rather than funerary purposes, and petrographic analysis indicates that they were probably made locally. Other finds include a chert hammerstone, probably used for knapping, and a small (25 mm dia.) sandstone disc with a central perforation that may have been a bead or button.

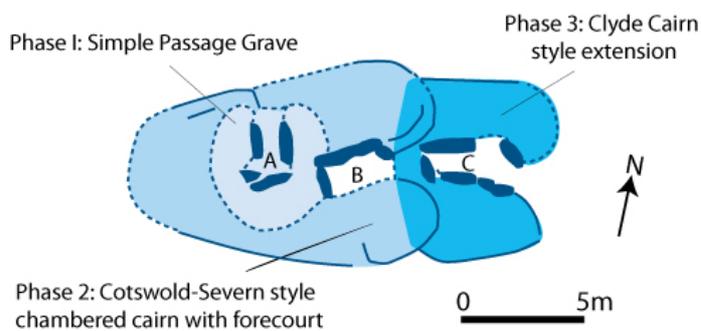


Fig. 3. Three chambers showing different influences. After Smith & Lynch 1987

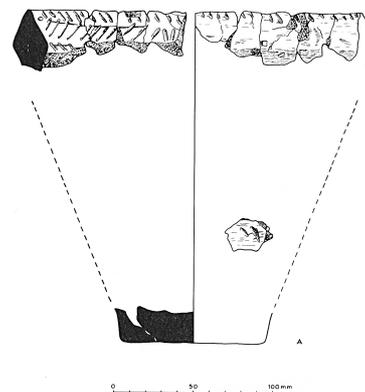


Fig. 4. Kite aerial view showing setting of tomb on bedrock. By The K Team [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0]

Chamber B is now collapsed with its massive capstone broken in two. The side slabs of the earlier western tomb were re-erected following the excavations, and can be seen as an open box shape of low upright stones. The eastern chamber is largely intact with tall portal stones standing in front of the lower side slabs and capstone of the tomb itself.

Although no trace of burials survived within the tombs a 19th century reference (Jones 1855) suggests that urns and bones were found—thought to be from Chamber B. Pottery found in this chamber was heavily decorated Peterborough Ware of middle Neolithic date (see Fig. 5), a time when chambered tomb construction had ceased. It could indicate continued veneration or deliberate closing of the tomb.

Fig. 5. Peterborough ware vessel found in the Chamber A. Illustration by permission of Cambrian Archaeological Association from Smith & Lynch 1987, fig. 36. Copyright reserved.



The tomb was constructed in three phases (Fig. 3) between 3750 and 3500 BC, and was in use until around 2250 BC. Building began at the western end, on the highest point of the rocky knoll (Fig. 4). A square tomb (A) with a short entrance passage towards the north was covered with a circular stone cairn, which partly overlaid the site of the settlement. The tomb plan fits the category of *Simple Passage Grave*, one of the earliest types of chambered tomb.

A second larger, rectangular chamber (B) was later added to the east of Chamber A, and the cairn was extended over the whole structure. The resulting wedge-shaped cairn was faced with drystone walling and had a funnel-like forecourt in the style of *Severn-Cotswold* tombs.

In a final phase of building, Chamber C was constructed in the forecourt area, blocking Chamber B. The cairn was again extended and a new drystone forecourt constructed. This final construction it resembles tombs in SW Scotland known as '*Clyde cairns*'.

References and further information

- Jones, H.L. 1855. List of early British remains in Wales, III. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 3rd Series(I), 18–27
- Smith, C.A. & Lynch, F.M. 1987. *Trefignath and Din Dryfol: The excavation of two megalithic tombs in Anglesey*. Cambrian Archaeological Monographs 3. Cambrian Archaeological Association
- Lynch, F.M. 1970. *Prehistoric Anglesey*. Llangefni: Anglesey Antiquarian Society

Trefignath on CADW website: <http://cadw.gov.wales/daysout/trefignathburialchamber/?lang=en>

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