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# Groundwork

## I

The writing of history is essentially personal. Every historian selects, organises, and emphasises particular aspects of the available data. From that process emerges a personal interpretation of history, a personal reconstruction of the past.

This is particularly true in the case of the distant past – that shadowy region generally referred to as ‘prehistory’, a term with connotations which will be discussed in due course. The further back into the past one delves, the less certainty there is. As a consequence, in order to produce a coherent picture of the lives of the men and women who lived so very long ago – and, what is more important, the ideas and aspects of behaviour they have passed down to us – the historian has to do more, to try harder to join up the dots of whatever archaeological or documentary records are available.

This process inevitably involves speculation and imagination. Equally inevitable is the fact that historians (myself included) will interpret the past in the light of their own preconceptions and prejudices, which are shaped by acceptance or rejection of the norms and orthodoxies of their own age and society. The historian’s responsibility is to recognise this: to apply imagination, logic, and reason in pursuit of objectivity while knowing full well that it can never be attained. Therein lies the challenge, the interest, and the fun, but also many difficulties and contradictions. For example, the archaeologist Francis Pryor has characterised the latter part of the Bronze Age in Britain as peaceful and egalitarian. Two other experts in the field, Timothy Champion and Christopher Darvill, have seen it as a time when a warlike aristocracy dominated society. All three were working from the same basic information. None of them is wrong. They just assessed the material differently and reached different conclusions. This study, it should be added, inclines to the latter view, but that is simply my personal assessment of the available evidence.

History in this second sense is closely allied to identity – the historian’s sense of personal identity, and the broader cultural identity of the

society within which, and for which, he or she is writing. Identity may be racial, national, regional, or personal, but it is almost always defined as a mix of present qualities or characteristics that derive from the past. Historical identity can be useful in promoting understanding of the present. Equally, it can be dangerous. It can be slanted or distorted and used to justify partisan political or social actions. The best the historian can do is interpret the historical data – I am deliberately avoiding the word ‘facts’ – as they appear at the time and without conscious bias. The word ‘conscious’ is important because, ever since written records began, historical bias and misrepresentation has been used to flatter the great, to blacken the enemy, to drive home political arguments, and to justify everything from tax rises to racist pogroms.

On the positive side, history is open to different interpretations; it can be told in different ways and from different points of view; and that is its attraction. I have always found that history grows with you, perhaps because it is never static. New documents may be discovered. Known documents may be reinterpreted in the light of new knowledge. Accounts of events or descriptions of individuals – written, recorded, or filmed – may turn out to be partial or inaccurate. In recent years, archaeology has been the most exciting area. New sites have been discovered and new science-based techniques, such as dendrochronology and isotope analysis have allowed archaeologists to probe their new discoveries, and reassess old ones, with much greater precision.

Humility, therefore, is required. The single most important thing for the historian is to remember that he or she does not *know*; that whatever he or she might believe – and however passionately that belief may be held – it can never ultimately be proved. There will always be a chance that it did not happen that way, that things could be explained differently.

This book is thus a contribution to a debate which can never be concluded. It tells the story of that archipelago, consisting of something over six thousand islands and situated off the north-western shore of mainland Europe, which we nowadays call the British Isles. It begins with the first traces of humanoid creatures that we can identify, and it ends in the high medieval period – there is no precise end date because different parts of the archipelago developed in different ways – by which time most of the racial groupings and political entities that we recognise today had been established. The timescale is immense, and for all but the last fraction of



the period, dating is rarely more than approximate. In the same way, for all but that last fraction of time, documentary sources are non-existent. This is where speculation and imaginative reconstruction play their part.

To give a sense of the passage of time is not always easy. Nor is it necessarily helped by the now traditional segmentation of prehistory into Ages – Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze, Iron, and so on. Human prehistory is generally defined as the period from the first appearance of man right up until the invention of writing and the existence of written records. The term was coined in French – ‘*préhistorique*’ – in the 1830s by the French chemist and archaeologist, Paul Tournal (1805–72). It was first used in English by the Scottish antiquarian Daniel Wilson (1816–92) in his *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1851). How relevant is it today? Why should ‘history’ begin with the appearance of the written word – especially in an age where the scientific techniques that support both geology and archaeology can give us increasingly detailed information about the evolution of the land and its peoples? These sources can often provide us with information that is more reliable than that contained in early documents. The written word is the basis of modern civilisation, and there is a temptation to give too much weight to early written sources precisely because they are written – a temptation encouraged in the past by the fact that Latin and Greek authors assumed what many would now see as a disproportionate importance in the British educational system. That said, written sources do have the effect of humanising our view of the past. They offer us names and characters, descriptions of how people behaved, of their religious practices, of what was important to them. Coins give the names of kings and tribes. Inscriptions tell us who built a particular monument or structure, which legion was stationed where. Such sources undoubtedly have their value, but they must be used with caution. In this study, the terms ‘prehistory’ and ‘prehistoric’ will continue to be used in the accepted manner simply as a matter of convenience, but with the caveat that their use should not be taken to imply that there is any hard-and-fast division between ‘prehistory’ and ‘history’.

In the 1820s, ninety years after Tournal’s invention of prehistory, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (1788–1865), Director of the Royal Museum of Nordic Antiquities in Copenhagen, divided it into three. In his view, the archaeologists of the time did not pay sufficient attention to the context of their finds, to what objects were found together and what that implied,

so he came up with the Three Age System – Stone, Bronze and Iron – as a workable chronological framework. Forty years later in 1865, Sir John Lubbock (1834–1913), the English banker, politician, botanist, ethnologist, and archaeologist – in fact, a classic example of the Victorian polymath – published *In Pre-Historic Times*, which became one of the most influential archaeological books of the nineteenth century. Lubbock's contribution was to divide the Stone Age into an early period when man lived alongside now extinct animals, the Palaeolithic (or Old Stone Age), and a later period, the Neolithic (or New Stone Age), characterised by polished stone tools.<sup>1</sup> A few years later in 1872, the Irish archaeologist, Hodder M. Westropp, introduced the term Mesolithic (or Middle Stone Age) to define a recognisably separate phase of human development between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic.

The Three Age System remains the generally accepted way of segmenting prehistory, but, of course, the transition between one developmental phase and the next not only took a long time, it took place at different times in different places. Neolithic culture, for example, emerged in the so-called Fertile Crescent by 10,000 BC or perhaps earlier. It arrived in Greece about 6800 BC and then spread across Europe at a rate which has been estimated at one kilometre a year. In terms of the geographical region we are considering here – those lands which eventually became the British Isles – the Palaeolithic Age covered the period from mankind's earliest beginnings until about 9600 BC. The Mesolithic, marked by smaller, more closely-worked stone tools and a more defined hunter-gatherer lifestyle, lasted until about 4200 BC. The Mesolithic led into and overlapped with the Neolithic, which continued until about 2500 BC, and was characterised by the spread of arable farming, the domestication of animals, and the use of more sophisticated tools and technologies. The later stages of the Neolithic overlapped with the Bronze Age. This overlap, when both metals and stone tools were in use, may have lasted for anything up to five hundred years, from 2500 to 2000 BC. Some archaeologists insert an extra period here, which they call the Chalcolithic Age, referring to those centuries when copper was smelted, but before it was combined with tin to produce bronze. In general usage, however, the British Bronze Age is held to have begun about 2500 BC and to have lasted until about 800 BC, when it gave way to the Iron Age. The Iron Age then lasted until the coming of the Romans in 43 AD – at which point 'prehistory' gave way to 'history'.

These divisions are understood by most lay readers and fixed within the compass of the educational system; and they have their uses. Given that the vast span of prehistory cannot be divided up by kings or dynasties, they provide useful reference points, charting the stages of human development. They also provide a framework for archaeologists and others engaged in the more detailed task of relating one set of finds to another, of dating and categorising the archaeological record. However, their utility has its limits. Many archaeologists now see the later Neolithic and the early Bronze Age as having more in common with each other than with the preceding or succeeding periods. And they see the late Bronze Age, early Iron Age and middle Iron Age as constituting a single definable period, while the Late Iron Age is then attached to the Roman period which followed. In the light of current research, these ideas make sense.

Again, the conventional Ages of prehistory will be used in this study as a matter of convenience, to indicate broad periods of time and the general characteristics associated with them. However, it must be emphasised that these terms are not only generalisations, but also retrospective: they only make sense to us because we know what happened next. The risk is that they suggest a rigid, artificial structure focussed on change and transformation. They create a temptation to see each new stage of social or technological development as a sudden burst of progress, after which nothing much happened until the next Age came along. The fact is, of course, that human society is constantly changing and evolving – just like the view of it taken by historians – even when it moves slowly. Most of the cultural changes of prehistory took place over hundreds, even thousands of years, so to the population of the time the reality would have been one of continuity and slow transition. This becomes particularly important when we consider the process or processes by which change came about.

The traditional view – which developed as archaeology itself developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – was that the major cultural changes in the prehistory of the British Isles were brought about by successive waves of invaders and immigrants coming from the Continent. Invasion theory, as it is known, sees first Neolithic peoples, then Bronze Age peoples, then Celts, all arriving on these shores, bringing new tools and technologies, new art and new languages, and crucially, so the argument goes, replacing the existing inhabitants. Such a view remained widely current until the second half of the twentieth century, when a bat-

tery of new techniques – radiocarbon dating, dendrochronology, isotope analysis, and the use of computers to process vast amounts of data – enabled archaeologists and historians to take a more scientific approach to excavation and to challenge accepted ideas. Invasion theory was regarded as too simplistic, and a much larger role accorded to acculturation: the process by which ideas, technologies, fashions, and even languages are transferred from one population group to another through extended contact, whether that contact is the result of trading relationships, ‘political’ exchanges, kinship visits, intermarriage, or any other form of interaction. Such an approach still allowed for immigration, and even invasion – albeit on a much smaller scale than previously assumed – but it argued against the idea that major prehistoric cultural changes necessarily involved the wholesale displacement and replacement of one population by another.

However, nothing – not even prehistory – stays still, and in recent decades the advent of increasingly sophisticated techniques of DNA analysis have transformed our understanding of at least two crucial stages in the cultural and racial development of the British Isles. DNA extracted from skeletal remains now suggests that the arrival of Neolithic peoples towards the end of the fifth millennium BC, and the arrival of the Beaker People in the middle of the third millennium, were both marked by population change on a significant scale, although there is nothing in the archaeological record to suggest that either change was characterised or accompanied by a large-scale invasion. The new evidence appears convincing, although given what has gone before, we should perhaps add the caveat that DNA analysis is a relatively new technology and larger-scale studies with broader sampling will be required before it can be considered wholly conclusive. All one can say is that each period of the prehistory and early history of the British Isles needs to be approached on its own terms and with an open mind.

Traditional invasion theory may have been overtaken by science, but it is worth exploring because it helps explain how and why, in the past, British prehistory was interpreted as it was. Scientific archaeology, as opposed to amateur digging and object collecting, developed only slowly over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It built on the work of men such as Thomsen, Lubbock, and Westropp, and established both a structure and a chronological framework for prehistory. Anti-quarian writers and early archaeologists, with no such framework and no

detailed archaeological record to guide them, had to rely on a combination of deduction and guesswork. The written sources available to them were a mixture of ancient documents and 'histories', many of which contained as much fantasy as fact – and sometimes more. And, of course, they relied also, as we all do, on the intellectual orthodoxies of their time.

The first descriptions of Britain and the British are found in the works of Greek and Roman authors, to whom Britain was a remote and difficult land, populated by people with whose lives and culture they had no point of connection. By the sixteenth century, the study of classical literature was an essential part of every gentleman's education and had a profound cultural influence, so that when Caesar, Cicero, Tacitus and others wrote that the Britons were savage, painted and ignorant, their opinions went unchallenged. And when, for example, James VI and I (r. in Scotland, 1567–1625; in England, 1603–24) commissioned the architect Inigo Jones (1573–1652) to carry out a study of Stonehenge, it was self-evident that such a vast monument could not have been built by the savage barbarians described by Roman authors. The Romans themselves, Jones concluded, must have been responsible. Others suggested that it was the Saxons, or the Danes, or even the Phoenicians. But the message was clear: the native Britons (and precisely who they might have been is something we will explore in due course) were too primitive to have built it. The expertise must have come from abroad. Even the writer John Aubrey (1626–97), who did correctly attribute Stonehenge to 'the Britons', struggled to square their ability to build such a complex and sophisticated structure with the received picture of savages dressed in skins.

Another aspect of the difficulties faced by early archaeologists in establishing a reliable model for prehistory is illustrated by the story of William Buckland (1784–1856) and the Red Lady of Paviland. Buckland was a figure of immense authority in the world of geology and archaeology at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He became Oxford University's Reader in Mineralogy in 1813 and its first Reader in Geology in 1819. He was the first man to write a full description of a fossilised dinosaur which he called a *Megalosaurus*. He was also a clergyman – later to become Dean of Westminster – who was insistent that archaeological discoveries could only be interpreted in the light of the story of man as told in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> In 1823, excavating Goat's Hole Cave, one of the Paviland Caves on the Gower Peninsula in Wales, Buckland uncovered a partial

skeleton which had apparently been dyed with red ochre and buried with seashell necklaces and ivory jewellery. From the decoration, he assumed the remains to be female. As a good Christian of his time, he accepted the biblical chronology of Bishop Ussher (1581–1656), which dated the Creation to 4004 BC and the Flood to 2349 BC; and, as no human could pre-date the Flood, he came to the conclusion that the skeleton was Roman. Putting the two assumptions together, he hypothesised that the remains were those of a Roman prostitute, or possibly a witch. What he had in fact discovered was a man's body, dating from c.31,000 BC, and the oldest evidence of ceremonial burial yet found in Western Europe. What Buckland demonstrates is not only the ingrained assumption that anything new or complex or out of the ordinary was too sophisticated to be native to Britain, but also the added complication of trying to reconcile empirical observation with religious orthodoxy.

The idea that the native Britons were essentially ignorant savages was deeply entrenched; it was reinforced by the Three Age System which offered a simple, progressive chronology for prehistory; and a combination of the two ideas produced invasion theory, which seemed to offer a clear explanation for the process underlying that chronology. Each new stage of development *must* have been brought from Europe, because it could not have originated in the British Isles; and because the natives were primitive barbarians, it must have been imposed upon them by culturally superior invaders. Some progress was made during the course of the nineteenth century – the work of John MacEnery (1796–1841) and William Pengelly (1812–94) swept away Bishop Ussher's biblical chronology – but it was surprisingly little. As late as 1899, Professor John Meiklejohn of the University of St Andrews, could describe the 'pre-Celtic inhabitants' of Britain as 'stunted savages, whose tools and weapons were of flint, wood, or bone; who dressed in skins, painted their bodies with red ochre and blue woad juice.'<sup>3</sup>

Invasion theory was the product of the collective wisdom of archaeologists and historians at a particular time. At the time, it was a useful tool, allowing them to structure their ideas more clearly than before. Yet it also reflected the broader political and ideological temper of the age in which it was formulated. Britain was the hub of a huge and expanding empire. The study of prehistory was still in its infancy, but historians had developed a clear-cut scheme of early British history from the arrival of the Romans

onwards. This scenario – which was still being taught in British schools as late as the 1980s – was also constructed around a series of invasions. Romans, Angles, Saxons, Norwegians, Danes, and Normans – so the theory went – all invaded and all brought with them their own particular racial characteristics. From the resulting mixture, so the argument continued, emerged the unique British character which went on to win and to rule the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. Unlike other contemporary European theories of national character, this one did not depend or dwell on racial purity. Rather, it saw the English – not the inhabitants of other parts of the British Isles who were by that time branded as Celts – as super-mongrels: superior because they possessed all the virtues of all the races that had invaded over the centuries. Invasion theory effectively extended this approach backwards into prehistory, and thus became a means of reinforcing the concept of British exceptionalism.

It will, I hope, be apparent from the above that this history is social and political in the broadest sense of those terms. It begins with the earliest traces of mankind yet found in the British Isles. It follows the emergence of new societies with new patterns of settlement, new technologies, and new ways of recording their presence on the landscape. It examines the linguistic and racial composition of the British Isles when they became part of recorded history with the arrival of the Romans. It explores the turbulent post-Roman period when new peoples arrived from the Continent, raiding and invading and establishing new kingdoms. And it takes the story to the point where we can identify the foundations of the nations and polities of the British Isles as they exist today. Art, literature, and other forms of cultural expression are, of course, part of the story. Neolithic stonework and polished stone axes, Bronze Age daggers and Irish goldwork, illuminated manuscripts from Celtic monasteries, the heroic tales of Irish and Welsh heroes, Anglo-Saxon art and poetry: all these are key signifiers of group, regional, national, and even political identity, and all feature in these pages. That said, given the problems and preoccupations of our present time – the United Kingdom's role in relation to Europe and immigration being not the least of them – I feel there is much to be gained from re-examining both the origins of the nations that today inhabit the British Isles and the way in which the historians of previous centuries have interpreted that story. In particular, given the Anglocentric approach of so many historians in the past, I devote more space to Scotland, Ireland and

Wales, as well as to such defunct polities as the Kingdom of the Isles and Alt Clud, whose contribution to the overall shaping of the social and political complexion of the British Isles is equally important.

I hope that in due course the development of the creativity, the intellectual and imaginative structures, and the individual drive and intelligence that have played a major part in driving all forms of change since the early medieval period will be the subject of a companion volume, but that is for the future.

## II

Some terminology needs to be examined and, as far as possible, defined at this point. How should one refer to areas, regions, and places as they existed during the prehistoric period? It is important for the reader to be able to locate Goat's Hole Cave, Callanish (Calanais), or Stonehenge on his or her mental map of the world. The obvious solution is to provide the necessary references by using contemporary names, but such a course has its risks. Associating locations from the distant past with modern-day political, civic, and administrative entities and boundaries is both anachronistic and potentially misleading. Equally, avoiding contemporary names may well prove disorientating for the modern reader. In one sense, that might serve a useful purpose. The tribe who buried one of their number with some ceremony in Goat's Hole Cave would have had a race memory, but no developed sense of history. They were travelling, nomadic peoples, but they had no maps. They would have had a sense of direction; they would have had a knowledge of the main features of the lands across which they moved; and they would presumably have named those features – the seas, rivers, mountain ranges, peaks and headlands – in their own language. What those names were, we can never know; nor can we assume that the names used by one tribe would have been the same as those used by another. In such a context, it may be appropriate for the modern reader to experience a slight sense of uncertainty, and it is probably less misleading than using names that take their significance from peoples and events of later ages.<sup>4</sup>

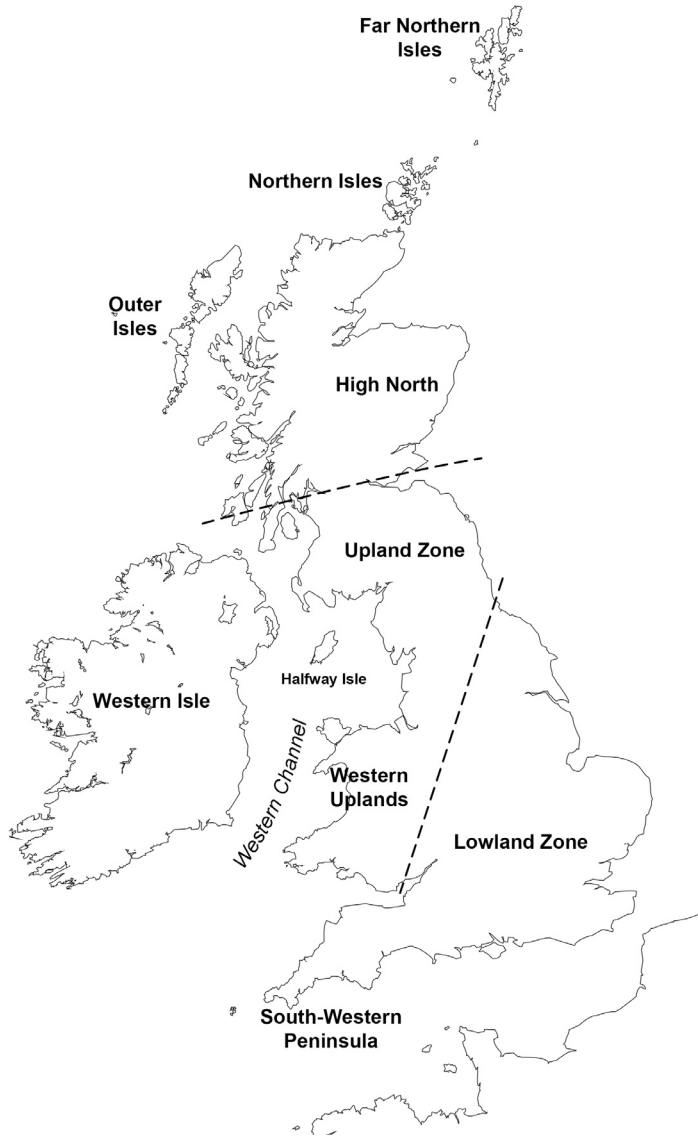
A compromise is necessary. While using contemporary names and locations to identify specific prehistoric sites, the first part of this study will use other terms for larger geographic entities:



- The Western Lands: Western Europe including the British Isles
- The Continental Lands: Western Europe, excluding the British Isles
- The Peninsular Lands: that area, then still connected to the Continent, which eventually became the British Isles
- The Archipelago: the British Isles once they had become islands
- The Main Island: Great Britain
- The Lowland Zone: Great Britain south and east of a line drawn between the Bristol Channel and the Tees, excluding Devon and Cornwall
- The Upland Zone: Great Britain north and west of the same line
- The Western Uplands: Wales
- The High North: Scotland north of the Central Belt
- The South-Western Peninsula: Devon and Cornwall
- The Western Channel: the Irish Sea
- The Western Isle: Ireland
- The Halfway Isle: the Isle of Man
- The Outer Isles: the Outer Hebrides
- The Northern Isles: Orkney
- The Far Northern Isles: Shetland

Such a scheme may sound awkward or simplistic, but it is intended to remind – indeed, to emphasise – that these lands had an existence in the minds of the peoples who lived in them long before the emergence of the ethnic and cultural identities and political entities by which they are now defined.

Once we reach later ages where documentary sources are available, names of people and places pose a particular problem. It is impossible to be wholly consistent or to satisfy everyone. Latin names are easier to deal with because Latin texts have been studied over the centuries and Latin spelling largely standardised. However, where British names appear in Latin texts – and many such names are known to us only from Latin sources – the spelling will be an approximation of what a Celtic-language name sounded like to the scribe or his informants. And, of course, later historians have made their judgements and choices on the basis of what the Latin scribes wrote. For example, Iceni is the commonly accepted spelling of the British tribe who inhabited East Anglia at the time of the Roman invasion. However, the name has on occasion been spelt Eceni, and first century AD coins from the area use the spelling Ecen. The queen



Map 1 Regions of the Archipelago

of the Iceni, who mounted possibly the most dangerous rebellion against Roman rule, was for many years spelt Boadicea. More recently, the spelling Boudicca has been preferred as being closer to what is thought to be the original Celtic root.

With Irish, Scottish, and Welsh names, whether found in Celtic-language manuscripts, or transliterated into Latin or English, we find an almost infinite variety of alternative spellings. Here, the problems of transliteration are complicated by the fact that the scribes may be trying to interpret regional differences in pronunciation or to write down names from versions of P- and Q-Celtic that they themselves did not speak. Scottish kings in particular are sometimes referred to by their Gaelic name, and sometimes by its anglicised version. Cináed MacAlpín thus frequently appears as Kenneth MacAlpin; Domnall mac Ailpín (*sic*) as Donald I; and Causantín mac Cináeda as Constantine I. In such cases, I have listed the main alternatives when the individual first enters the story, and then used the version of the name that seems to me most appropriate in the context of the overall narrative.

With Scandinavian names, the situation is still more complicated – especially when we come to those individuals who played a part in the story of both Viking Ireland and Viking Jórviik. Most of them had both an Old Norse and an Irish name. The two names are often not obviously similar, and there is frequently also a defining nickname. For example, Amláib Cuarán, as he is referred to in this text and most commonly referred to in literature dealing with the period, was twice King of Dublin and twice King of Jórviik. Cuarán is a nickname meaning sandals. His name in Irish Gaelic was Amláib mac Sitric, and in Old Norse he was Olaf Sigtryggsson. There are also two or three alternative anglicised versions of his name. As before, I have listed the most common alternatives when individual first appears and then chosen what seems to me to be the most appropriate version.

Anglo-Saxon also requires the author to make choices. Should it be King Ælfred or King Alfred? King Eadward or King Edward? Harald or Harold? For the most part, I have chosen the spelling that is closest to the Anglo-Saxon version of the name. I have, however, varied this practice where I felt the need to distinguish between two characters with the same name. Thus, Harald Haradrada retains the contemporary spelling, while Harold Godwineson uses the later Anglicised spelling. And I confess to having indulged one of two personal preferences. My use of Godwineson, rather than the much more common Godwinson, is a case in point. It is closer to the Anglo-Saxon, and I prefer the sound it makes.

In all cases where names and their variants are concerned, I have been

guided by my sense of what is appropriate to the cultural character of the narrative, and a concern that the reader should be able to follow the twists and turns of the story and its actors without undue difficulty.

## 1 A Sense of Perspective

The village of Happisburgh – pronounced ‘Hazeboro’ – sits on the cliffs on the north-east coast of Norfolk, looking out onto the North Sea roughly halfway between Cromer and Great Yarmouth. It is a small village of some nine hundred inhabitants. It has a pub, a handful of houses, a fifteenth-century church, a lighthouse, a lifeboat station, and a coastline that is being rapidly eroded by the sea. Eight hundred and fifty thousand years ago (give or take fifty thousand) the geography of the area was very different. The land where the village now stands formed part of the north bank of the estuary of a large river, a precursor of the Thames, flowing eastwards to the sea. To the north of the estuary, the coastline ran north-south. To the south, it followed a south-easterly course until it reached a point in the middle of what is now the North Sea, some distance offshore from Den Haag. There, it turned north again, creating a large north-facing gulf into which this proto-Thames emptied itself.

The coastal erosion that is pushing the coastline back is of great concern to the residents. Over the years, it has caused a number of houses to collapse into the sea, but it has also led to some spectacular archaeological finds. As long ago as the 1820s, local fishermen, hauling in their nets, were bringing up the antlers, bones, horns, the teeth of long extinct, prehistoric species. Storms battering the coast revealed fossilised tree-stumps and the shapes of leaves imprinted in layers of sedimentary rock. Large quantities of bison bones suggested that early man might well have been active in the area, but it was not until 2000, when a retired policeman walking his dog on the beach found a black flint axe head, that there was actual evidence of a prehistoric human presence.

The discovery led to the area being explored and excavated. Archaeologists uncovered more than eighty flint tools, together with animal bones bearing marks that suggested the animals had been butchered by men using stone tools. Then, in 2013, a period of stormy weather swept away all the sand from part of the beach, revealing the compacted silts

which had once bordered the proto-Thames. There, in the silts, were some fifty fossilised footprints. They were only exposed for a few hours at low tide, and scientists had to work quickly to record the details before, within a fortnight of their appearance, they disappeared, eroded by the same tidal scour that had exposed them. Careful study suggested that the footprints had been made by a group of five individuals, whose height – calculated from the length of the prints – varied between 0.93 and 1.74 metres, indicating the presence of children as well as adults. The strata in which the footprints were found were also analysed. The magnetism of the rocks, together with the flora and fauna preserved in them, gave a date of between 800,000 and 900,000 BC, making the footprints the earliest traces of humankind yet found in northern Europe.

Who were these people and what were they doing? Palaeontologists have built up a picture of a grassy river valley surrounded by dense coniferous forests, inhabited by a bestiary of now extinct or locally extinct animal species – mammoths, woolly rhinos, hippos, giant deer, sabre-toothed tigers, lions, wolves, and other potentially dangerous species. Climatologists, working from the evidence of fossilised plants and insects, have suggested that the climate would have been roughly equivalent to that of southern Scandinavia today. This means that the Happisburgh group must have had the ability to clothe themselves – presumably in skins – to build some kind of shelter, and to keep warm in winter. They were apparently walking southwards, away from the mouth of the river. What were they doing? Collecting shellfish? Or edible plants from the water's edge? Were they looking for a place to cross the river? Would they have made a camp in the forest? Or on the riverbank? Or on an island which could offer protection from predators or enemies? All sorts of ideas can be advanced, but they remain at best educated speculation. As Happisburgh has not yielded any human fossils, we cannot even be sure to which species or sub-species of humans this group belonged – although there is a broad consensus that they were probably *Homo antecessor* or 'Pioneer Man' and, as such, representatives of the first wave of humans to move into, explore, and settle the lands which now form the European Continent.

Despite the uncertainties and the impossibility of knowing who these people were, how they lived their lives, or how they thought, this first sighting of man in northern Europe is important because it gives a sense of

perspective. Most of this book deals with the ideas, beliefs, and actions of men during the last 6,000 years because they are to a greater or lesser degree accessible; because one can trace or speculate on their visual, psychological, and even political legacy as it affects life in the British Isles today. Nonetheless it is worth recognising that those 6,000 years represent just over half of one percent of the time that has elapsed since the Happisburgh group left their footprints on the bank of the river that would one day run through London, under the Millennium Bridge and past the Tower of London to the Thames Barrier.

The Happisburgh footprints belong to the early Palaeolithic Era. They were made at a time when sea levels were lower than they are today, so while we know almost nothing of the Happisburgh group and whatever tribe they may have belonged to, we can be sure that they lived not on an island, but on a peninsula. The southern shore of the gulf into which the proto-Thames drained also formed the northern shore of a broad, chalk isthmus. Technically referred to as the Weald—Artois Anticline, but more commonly known as the Land Bridge, this isthmus connected the Peninsular Lands with the main body of the Western Lands, allowing men and animals to move freely back and forth. For the next 400,000 years, the Peninsular Lands appear to have been sparsely but more or less continuously inhabited by nomadic bands of humans who moved with the seasons, following the migration routes of the animals which provided their food. *Homo antecessor* was succeeded by *Homo heidelbergensis*, whose fossilised remains have been found in Eartham Pit, a disused quarry near Boxgrove in Surrey. Dating from 500,000 years ago, they are the oldest human remains yet found on the western side of the Land Bridge. Then, about 478,000 years ago, there came a period of intense glaciation during which the ice sheets advanced to cover some three-quarters of the land area of the Peninsula. Early man either died or moved south in search of a warmer climate. Towards the end of this glacial period, about 425,000 BC, the Land Bridge was breached, probably by a massive outburst flood, when a vast reservoir of glacial melt water suddenly burst through the ice sheets which had held it back. The Peninsula became an island, although only for what was – at least in geological terms – a short period. The climate warmed and the Land Bridge, though much eroded, reappeared. Movement to and from the Peninsula became possible again, and those who came belonged to a new species of human.<sup>5</sup>

Many traces of early man have been discovered relatively close to the western end of the Land Bridge, and the earliest Neanderthal remains yet found on the Peninsula were discovered at Swanscombe in Kent in the 1930s. They date from *c.*400,000 BC. Further Neanderthal remains, dating from *c.*225,000 BC were found in Bontnewydd near St Asaph in North Wales. They represent the most northerly evidence of Neanderthal habitation in the Western Lands. Neanderthals were skilled at making and using stone tools; they were capable of hunting big animals, such as mammoths; they knew how to butcher what they killed in a comparatively sophisticated manner; they could catch dolphins, sharks, crabs, and other seafood; and they used fire. Fossil records from across Europe allow us to reconstruct their physical way of life to a limited degree – though to a greater extent than any previous human species. Yet we can barely guess at their inner life. How closely did it approach that of modern man? Archaeological evidence indicates that they had some kind of social organisation. How did it work? They must have had a language that enabled them to cope with the practical tasks of hunting and surviving. How far beyond that did it go? Archaeological finds in Spain suggest that they used body paint, perhaps even make-up. In Spain, there is also evidence that they painted shapes on cave walls. Does this mean that they were capable of the kind of abstract thought which finds expression in art? What were they doing in those deep, dark caves in the first place? They must have had belief systems and rituals. One school of thought suggests that some cave art may be the product of the shamanic rituals involving psycho-active drugs; and drug residues have been identified in some centres of cave art. Does that explain their presence underground? Or were their beliefs based on the seasons? On the stars and astronomy? Or on fertility? Analogy with other so-called primitive tribes elsewhere in the world would make any or all of these ideas possible – even probable – but we cannot really know.<sup>6</sup>

Somewhere around the time of the Bontnewydd Neanderthals, the Land Bridge was again briefly severed by another outburst flood. It reappeared and, over the next twenty or thirty millennia, expanded or contracted in rhythm with the advances and retreats of the ice sheets and the consequent fluctuations in sea level. About 180,000 years ago, the ice sheets advanced once again, and the climate deteriorated to the point where the Neanderthals, like their predecessors, either died or moved south. There are no human fossils or traces of human life in the Peninsula

for the next 120,000 years. The Neanderthals did return, but only – again in terms of the timescales we are considering here – for a comparatively short period.

*Homo sapiens* first emerged in Africa over 150,000 years ago. It took them over 100,000 years to reach the Continental Lands, and another 4,000 to reach the Peninsular Lands. The first evidence of their presence is the fossilised remains of a jawbone found in a cave in Devon and dated to approximately 41,000 years ago. At this stage *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals overlapped. The nature and frequency of contact between the two species remains a mystery, but modern DNA analysis suggests that at some stage, or perhaps at several different stages, they interbred. What evidence we have, however, indicates that the two coexisted for a comparatively short time, after which the Neanderthals disappeared. The cause or causes of their extinction continue to be a matter for debate. Did they compete with *Homo sapiens* for hunting grounds? Did competition for food lead to physical confrontation and violence? It is possible, but in a sparsely populated landscape this can hardly explain the demise of a whole species. Or, like the Spaniards arriving in Mexico, did *Homo sapiens* bring new diseases to which the Neanderthals had no immunity? Recent research has raised the possibility of a link between the extinction and the eruption of the volcano Campi Flegrei, not far from present-day Naples. Volcanologists consider that the eruption, which took place between 39,200 and 39,400 years ago, was the biggest in Europe in the past 200,000 years. It threw some two hundred cubic kilometres of ash into the atmosphere with devastating effects on the climate. This scenario is persuasive in so far as there are no known Neanderthal sites in the Western Lands after 39,000 years ago, but it begs the question as to why *Homo sapiens* proved more resilient in the face sudden climatic change. Whatever caused the extinction, *Homo sapiens* was left the sole surviving human species.

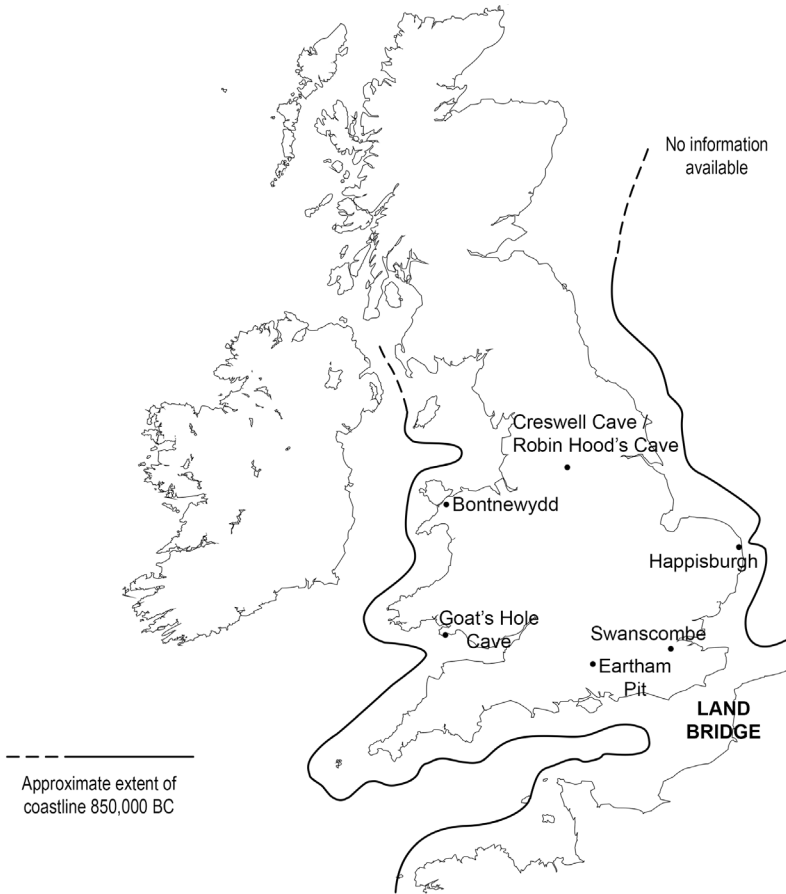
The ice sheets advanced again and the consequent drop in sea levels was massive. The seas to the east of the Peninsular Lands simply disappeared. In their place was now a broad plain across which *Homo sapiens* chased the herds of giant deer and mammoths on which he relied for food. To the north and west of the Peninsula, the seas also receded so that the entire continental shelf became dry land. The Peninsula was no longer a peninsula, but part of a broad and gently undulating addition to the north-western edge of the Western Lands, which included Orkney and Shetland



and stretched far out into the Atlantic. Only the southern third of what had been the Peninsula remained free of glaciation, and it was during this period that the 'Red Lady' of Paviland was buried in Goat's Hole Cave. Who he was, or what he was – tribal chief, elder, warrior, hunter, spiritual leader – we shall never know. However, his remains do give us a very brief glimpse of early *Homo sapiens*, what used to be called Cro-Magnon man, although archaeologists these days prefer the term 'European early modern human'. The fact that he was singled out for a special, ceremonial burial indicates a collective response and shared values among those who buried him. It also implies a sense, inculcated by some kind of belief system, that humankind exists in relation to time.

Glaciation intensified again about 25,000 years ago, and the Western Lands were once again abandoned. The Last Glacial Maximum, as it is known, buried most of the Main Island and the Western Isle under an ice sheet 1.5 kilometres thick. It was 10,000 years before the ice melted and humans returned. When they did, they hunted mammoth, red deer, reindeer, and wild horses, as well as smaller mammals such as hares and foxes, across what was probably a treeless, tundra-like landscape. Ivory weapons, tools, and beads, together with stone knives and axes, all dating from this period were found in Gough's Cave in the Cheddar Gorge. The same site revealed both animal and human bones. The human bones had had the flesh carved from them. Excarnation – the stripping of the flesh from the bones of the dead – was common throughout prehistory, but the fact that it appears to have been done in the same way and with the same stone tools used to butcher animals may well suggest cannibalism. If it does, then we have to ask whether this was 'everyday' cannibalism: cannibalism for food? Or was it cannibalism as a ritual associated with death: cannibalism as a means of ingesting and somehow sharing the experience or the courage or the wisdom of the dead? We cannot be sure, but it is worth noting that Gough's Cave also contained skulls apparently fashioned into drinking bowls, a practice in later times and in other parts of the world associated with tribal rituals.

An even more important discovery was made in 2003 in Robin Hood's Cave at Creswell Crags, a limestone gorge on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border. Until then, no cave art had been discovered at any Palaeolithic site in the Peninsular Lands and the assumption was that, for whatever reason, there was none to discover. A simple and delicately



Map 2 A Sense of Perspective

beautiful outline engraving of a horse's head on a piece of rib, known as 'The Ochre Horse', had been discovered in the same location as long ago as 1876, but it had been categorised with other items of worked bone, such as beads and needles, and not as cave art. Now rough bas-reliefs of animals (stags, bison, horses, bears) and birds (notably an ibis) were identified on the walls and ceiling of the cave. Further research then identified the figures of dancing women, and marks which were taken to be stylised representations of female genitalia. Some of these identifications, made in the excitement of discovery, may have been a little enthusiastic and have subsequently been questioned. The cave was evidently a place of significance, but the nature of that significance remains obscure. Why, for example,

should one drawing be made so deep inside the cave that it would have required artificial light to create it, and in a place where only one person at a time could see it, and then only by lying on their side in a confined space?<sup>7</sup> Could it represent some kind of shamanic test or initiation? Or an attempt to get close to the spiritual otherworld? The discovery of the Creswell carvings, which have been dated to 11,000 BC, was followed by the identification of a mammoth carved on the wall of Gough's Cave, and a reindeer on the wall of a cave in the Gower Peninsula, both dating from more or less the same period. None of these works bear comparison with the spectacular colour and detail of the cave art at Altamira in Spain, or Lascaux and Niaux in France, which date from between 15,000 and 17,000 years ago, but they do indicate some level of common culture among the widely-spread inhabitants of the Western Lands.

Reporting the Creswell discovery in 2004, the *National Geographic News*, said: 'The finding proved for the first time that ancient Britons were capable of producing artwork similar to that of their Palaeolithic (early Stone Age) counterparts on continental Europe'<sup>8</sup> – a statement which highlights the difficulties inherent in trying to describe 'prehistory' and its peoples. The Creswell carvers did not have any counterparts on Continental Europe because the lands across which they hunted were an integral part of the same continental land mass – which was not shaped like the European land mass we know today and was certainly not called Europe. For the same reason, while they may be described as 'Palaeolithic', 'Early Stone Age', or 'Ice Age' people, they cannot be called 'ancient Britons'. Britain did not exist. They were, as far as we can tell, just the same as any other group or tribe of seasonal hunters who roamed the Western Lands.

About 12,900 years ago, the temperature, which had been rising, dropped again quite suddenly – possibly because cold water from the melting ice sheets interrupted the Gulf Stream. This cold snap lasted about 1,300 years and the hunter-gatherer tribes who left their traces at Gough's Cave and Creswell Crags probably abandoned the area for most of that time. About 11,600 years ago, a slightly different group of hunter-gatherers made a brief appearance. Their main contribution seems to have been the introduction of the bow and arrow, and their main prey was reindeer, but after two or three hundred years they, too, were driven away by falling temperatures.<sup>9</sup> Another two or three hundred years and the climate began to recover again. Beginning somewhere around 9000 BC, fresh

nomadic groups began to arrive. It was not a rapid process: the settlement – or resettlement – of the north-western edges of the Western Lands lasted some 5,000 years, but whatever climatic conditions or other difficulties they faced, these new people seem to have had the ability to adapt. Not only have the Peninsular Lands been continuously inhabited since that time, but DNA evidence suggests that the new arrivals made a significant contribution to the current gene pool. Their contribution has naturally enough been diluted over the millennia, but they remain the distant ancestors of many present-day British people.

## 2 Settling the Archipelago

Where did they come from, these new groups of hunter-gatherers?

The ice caps were melting, sea levels were rising, and the shape of the land was changing. The sea was encroaching from both north and south, reclaiming low-lying lands that had been sea in the past, so that the Peninsular Lands became a genuine peninsula once again, connected to the Continent by a new Land Bridge. The northern coast of this new Land Bridge stretched eastward from what would become the Wash, until it reached an unsubmerged area of the North Sea, known to archaeologists as Doggerland that was still connected to the Continental Lands. Doggerland, of course, survives as the shallow area of the North Sea known as the Dogger Bank. The southern coast of the Land Bridge was the head of a large estuary into which flowed both the proto-Thames and the proto-Rhine. Many of the new hunter-gatherers would have migrated from the Continental Lands, following the herds of reindeer and wild horses and populating the eastern side of the Peninsula. However, at much the same time, rising sea levels also had the effect of creating a new north–south channel on the western side of the Peninsular Lands, splitting off a new Western Isle from the main body of the Peninsula. Here, settlement followed a different pattern. DNA-based evidence emerging in recent years suggests that a significant proportion of the hunter-gatherer peoples who settled the Western Isle during the millennia following 9000 BC – and they seem to have favoured its east coast – came from northern Iberia, the Pyrenees, and the south-western corner of what is now France. Which means that they would have come by sea.

Once the Land Bridge was finally breached – probably between 5800 and 5400 BC – the sea would become of fundamental importance to life in the new Archipelago. Yet it is clear that even 2,000 years earlier there was an established channel of migration and communication running the length of Atlantic coastal waters, from Iberia to Armorica in the south to the coasts of the Western Isle and beyond, as far as the Northern and Far Northern Isles. Sea levels have risen significantly since then, and the remains of coastal camps, temporary settlements, and the boats on which their inhabitants depended for transport have long since disappeared under water, so archaeological evidence is lacking. However, there is nothing impossible in the scenario of groups of hunter-gathers making their way northward up the western shore of the Continental Lands, following the fishing grounds and shellfish beds, moving slowly, even taking generations on their journey. It is difficult otherwise to explain the appearance of settlements such as Mount Sandel in Coleraine, or Druimvargie near Oban, or on the Isle of Ulva in the Inner Hebrides – all of them dating from between 7000 and 4400 BC – or to explain the strength of the genetic link between these areas and Iberia. Over the millennia, the Atlantic seaways and their natural link to the Western Channel and the whole western side of the Archipelago would have a profound impact on the pattern of settlement and development of the Archipelago as a whole.

The coastal waters were rich in food. The excavation of middens on the Isle of Oronsay suggests that, unusually for Mesolithic times, people may have lived there all year round, or, perhaps more likely, returned for lengthy periods on a regular basis, relying on fish and seafood to sustain them. And the land was as food-rich as the sea. Indeed, the whole post-9000 BC colonisation of the Peninsular Lands may well have come about because of new and abundant sources of food resulting from climate change. What had been open tundra became pine forests and extensive woodlands of birch, alder, and hazel. What had been frozen ground became large expanses of boggy wetland. The forests were full of elk, roe deer, red deer, boar, and aurochs. The wetlands offered fish (although the archaeological absence of fish bones has led to suggestions that freshwater fish may have been taboo), as well as beavers and many kinds of birds: heron, stork, mallard, and other species of duck. Here were riches, but they had to be hunted in a different manner from reindeer and wild horses on the open plains. The hunters adapted. They developed tools for shap-

ing wood to make better spears, harpoons, and arrows; and they used tips or blades with barbed edges to improve their chances of making a kill.

Up to this point, man had apparently been seasonally nomadic, migrating as the animals he hunted migrated. Now, for the first time anywhere in the Western Lands, we have evidence of longer-term settlement. Oronsay has already been mentioned. At Star Carr in Yorkshire, excavations of a two-hectare site on the edge of what was once a lake have revealed the remains of a structure some three-and-a-half metres wide, with a floor apparently lined with moss and reeds. It dates from over 10,500 years ago, making it the oldest man-made structure yet identified in the Peninsular Lands, and it was inhabited for somewhere between two hundred and five hundred years. A similar structure, dating from 7600 BC and inhabited for at least a hundred years, was found at Howick in Northumberland. Another house of roughly the same age, oval in shape with thirty uprights probably supporting a large conical roof, was found at East Barns, near Dunbar. At Mount Sandel, positioned on a hilltop overlooking the River Bann in County Londonderry, archaeologists have uncovered what is at present the earliest known human settlement in the Western Isle. Excavations here revealed evidence of circular wood-framed structures up to five metres in diameter, as well as pits for storing food. Radiocarbon dating locates it in the middle of the eighth millennium BC, somewhere between 7900 and 7600 BC. Were such sites inhabited permanently? Or were they bases from which the hunters set out on seasonal migrations? And did these sites also have some spiritual or ritual significance? Whatever the case, the discovery of these house-like structures has challenged the long-held assumption that Mesolithic hunters were wholly nomadic; and it has also moved back by up to 4,000 years the date at which men in the Western Lands were thought to have built houses and created longer-term or semi-permanent settlements.

Sea levels continued to rise – sometimes faster, sometimes more slowly – narrowing the Land Bridge and flooding many coastal valleys. Around 6000 BC, one such valley on the southern coast of the Peninsula was home to a thriving seasonal or semi-permanent community. The sea which submerged it and the silt which covered it, have preserved much organic evidence that would not have survived on land of how people lived at the time. The valley where the community lived has become the Solent, the strait separating the Isle of Wight from the mainland, and the archaeo-

logical site at Bouldnor Cliff, near Yarmouth, is now eleven metres below sea level. It was first identified when a diver saw flint tools being ejected from a lobster's burrow. Despite the difficulties posed by the depth and the strong coastal current, the site has produced some striking finds. There are worked timbers, suggesting the construction of dwellings, shelters, and also boats – making it the earliest known boat-building site in the world. There is a wooden pipe, perhaps for water; and there are fibres twisted to form what appears to be string. All this indicates that the people who lived in the valley were developing skills and employing tools in a way not previously thought to have been current until the beginning of the Neolithic period, some 2,000 years later. The same site has also yielded grains of wheat, the earliest to be found in the Peninsular Lands, and DNA extracted from them matches strains originating in the Near East.<sup>10</sup> It seems unlikely that people living on the southern edge of the Peninsula 8,000 years ago were in direct contact with tribes living far away across the continental land mass, but it is certainly possible that they were at the end of a chain of communication along which goods were traded or exchanged.<sup>11</sup>

We do not know when rising sea levels made Bouldnor Cliff uninhabitable, but an event that may have played a part occurred around 5800 BC. Geological evidence suggests that a massive submarine landslide somewhere off the north-west coast of Norway – perhaps caused by an earthquake – triggered a huge tsunami, which swept southwards inundating much of Doggerland, breaking through the Land Bridge and swamping many coastal areas. Once the flood waters receded, the Land Bridge re-established itself, but not for long. One imagines a gradual process with the sea rising and advancing, changing the character of the low-lying lands, creating salt marsh, cutting new channels and widening estuaries. Perhaps in the later stages the connection was reduced to tidal mud flats or sand bars, allowing men and animals to cross only at low tide. Once the barrier was breached, tidal currents would scour the shallow waters, deepening and widening the narrow channel and turning it into a broad seaway. However and whenever it happened, we can be certain that there was a moment towards the end of the Mesolithic Era, when the Peninsular Lands became an offshore archipelago.

What can this story tell us that is relevant to our lives today? In terms specific to the British Isles, very little, beyond the obvious fact that the

origins of the British Isles and its people are inextricably bound up with those of the European Continent and its inhabitants. The idea that Britain and the British (or just as often England and the English) are somehow different by virtue of their separation from the Continent has a long history. It is there in the pronouncements justifying the English Reformation; Shakespeare draws on it in John of Gaunt's 'this sceptred isle' speech; it was accepted by many as the legitimising basis of Empire; and it came to the fore in the debate surrounding the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. It is a theme we shall examine in this study, but we can say at the outset that it has no basis in prehistory. We cannot know what a *Homo sapiens* of the time would have thought as he stood looking across a narrow stretch of water to an opposite shore: a shore which in his father's time, or perhaps during his own childhood, had been accessible on foot, but now required a boat. In all likelihood he would have felt more connection than separation. In terms of species and race and – we can only presume – culture and language, he would have been little, if at all, different from members of the tribes on the opposite shore.

The people of the new Archipelago gathered in small communities, groups or tribes. Most would have migrated seasonally – perhaps from a winter home camp to spring and summer hunting grounds, or from low to high ground – following their sources of food. Logic, supplemented by anthropological observation from elsewhere in the world, suggests that the extended family would have formed the basic organising principle of tribal society. Archaeologists have estimated that Mesolithic settlements in the interior of the Main Island could have supported populations of between twenty-five and fifty inhabitants, while those closer to the coast where food was easier to come by could have supported between one and two hundred. Beyond that, we can only guess as to how these people organised themselves socially or politically. Their settlements show evidence of communal and collective activity. Hunting was clearly a cooperative business. Someone had to make decisions and give the orders. Was it a patriarch, a tribal chief, a group of elders, the senior hunter or hunters? And was the practical decision-maker supported by a spiritual leader? We do not know how one tribe related to another; whether hunting grounds were claimed by a particular tribe, shared with others, or contested. Nor do we know how big the population was. Estimates, which are little more than guesswork, range from as few as 3,000 to 20,000 or more, but even



20,000 may still be a conservative figure. As more sites are identified and research continues, so we are being brought to the realisation that our ancestors were in many respects more sophisticated and probably more numerous than was previously assumed.

The word 'ancestors' is chosen deliberately. In 1903, a complete male skeleton was found in Gough's Cave, the oldest complete skeleton found in the Peninsular Lands. It has been dated to about 7150 BC and subsequently nicknamed 'Cheddar Man'. In 1997, DNA testing showed that Adrian Targett, a retired history teacher from Somerset, born in 1955, shared a maternal ancestor with Cheddar Man. Further testing and analysis have led scientists to conclude that members of the current British population who do not have a recent history of immigration share approximately ten per cent of their ancestry with the population to which Cheddar Man belonged. Few other skeletons from this period survive from burial sites in the Peninsular Lands, perhaps adding weight to the theory that the dead were usually dismembered, and the flesh cut from their bones. Aveline's Hole, a cave in the Mendip Hills, was discovered at the end of the eighteenth century and excavated in 1860. Unfortunately, many of the finds have been lost, but we do know that the cave contained the bones of some fifty individuals and two full skeletons. Recent tests on some of the bones that remain indicate that they were, on average, around 1.52 metres tall, and had a life expectancy of less than thirty years. Traces of red ochre (recalling the Red Lady of Paviland) and the presence of carefully placed ammonite fossils show that at least some of the bodies had been decorated or adorned, and we can speculate that the placing of their remains in the cave was accompanied by some kind of ceremony or ritual. Given the apparent rarity of such burials, we can only suppose Aveline's Hole was site of particular religious or spiritual significance.

The lives of Mesolithic people will inevitably remain largely closed to us. They are too far away. The archaeological data are often difficult to interpret, and we can never do more than speculate upon their thought processes, rituals, and beliefs. The fact that some of the surviving cave markings have been interpreted as representing female forms or female genitalia, coupled with analogous discoveries in the Continental Lands, suggest a focus on fertility – although one cannot assume that all tribes held the same beliefs and observed the same ritual practices. The moon may also have been a focus of attention. At Warren Field in Aberdeenshire,



Map 3 Settling the Archipelago

archaeologists have excavated twelve pits, dating from around 8000 BC, which, it has been claimed, are arranged in such a way as to act as a lunar calendar – though this interpretation has been disputed.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, it is worth noting that, while modern societies would separate the religious function of such a monument from the practical