

# Excavation of a Romano-British Hut at Boscreege in Gulval

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## THE SITE

THE HUT lies at SW 46963360, about a third of the way down a steep north-eastwards facing slope overlooking the Rosemorran valley, at about 420 ft. above O.D. It is in croft land, which has at some time been divided into small fields with a sunken way running down the south-eastern side. Owing to the density of the vegetation, it has not been possible to survey these accurately, and it cannot be stated whether or not they are contemporary with the hut. About ten yards uphill from the hut there are two upright stones on an almost level piece of ground, which may be the remains of another hut, or part of a field boundary.

The croft is called *Puscus Croft* in the Tithe Apportionment Survey for 1843, and is probably part of a property referred to as *Polpuscas* (Co. *pol puskes*, 'fish pool') in a deed of 1570 at the R.I.C., Truro (Henderson MSS., HA/2/18). For a description of the locality, with reference to adjacent sites, see *PWCFC II.4* (1960), 145, where the Puscus hut is shown as no. 8.

## EXCAVATION

The interior of the hut, and four radial sections across the wall, were excavated by the writers at week-ends during 1960 and 1961. Before excavation, the hut appeared as a circular depression 12 to 15 ft. in diameter, bounded by a turf-covered bank which was about 2 ft. high on the north side and which decreased almost to ground level on the south side. In spite of its unpromising appearance, the structure proved to be in a good state of preservation up to a height of 2 to 3 ft. above the floor. The unusual degree of levelling-up inside the hut was largely accounted for by a great quantity of stone which had presumably fallen from the upper courses of the wall.

The method of building the hut appears to have been to erect a strong wall of large granite slabs, set up vertically and trigged in position, and then to pack rubble and soil against the outside to a thickness of from 3 ft. 6 in. to 4 ft. In three of the four places where the exterior was cleared, no satisfactory outer face was discovered, whereas the inner face was in excellent condition for over half its circumference; on the east side there did appear to be some good stonework on the exterior, but this, as suggested below, may be a later rebuild. The inner diameter, as found on excavation, varied from 13 to 16 ft. It is, however, possible that as originally built it was a fairly uniform circle of about 13 ft. diameter, since on the south west side, where the greatest distortion occurs, no solid wall-face survives, but it consists of irregularly placed small stones which may be part of the rubble backing. No estimate can be made of the original height of the walls, but from the quantity of stone found in the filling it seems likely that it was considerably higher than the single course of orthostats which remains.

The entrance is on the west (uphill) side. It was originally splayed, being 3 ft. 6 in. wide at the inner end and 5 ft. 6 in. at the outer. The north side is flanked by three upright stones, of which the one at the inner corner is a fine post 3 ft. 2 in. high. The south side is built horizontally in three courses. The whole entrance is paved with flat stones, and at the inner edge two regularly-shaped stones side by side form a step, giving a drop of 9 in. to the floor of the hut. At a later date the entrance was reduced to a uniform width of 2 ft. 3 in. by building up the south side with horizontal facing-stones and rubble backing. (These stones are shown on the plan, Fig. 8, by dotted lines.)

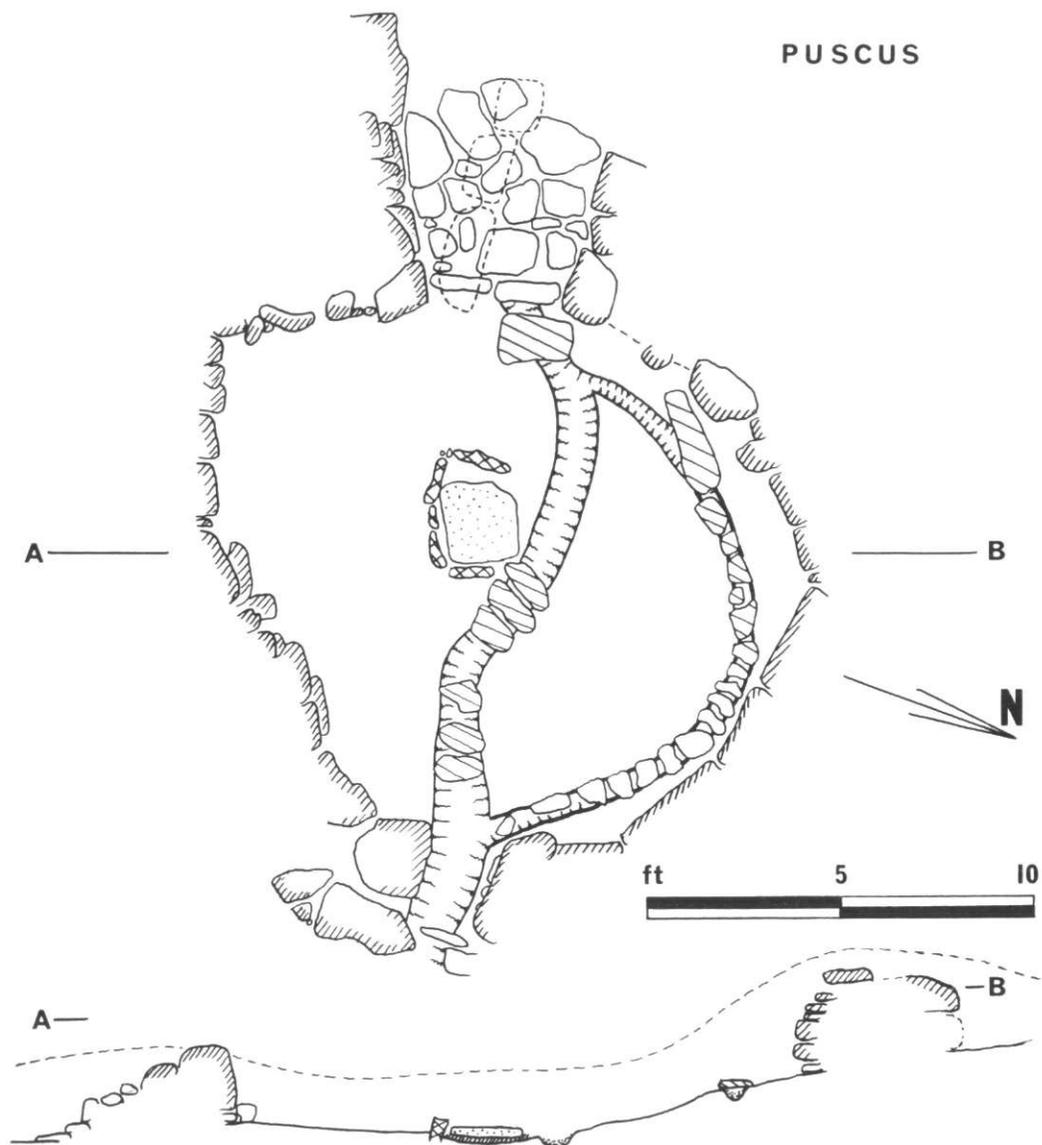


Fig. 8 Hut at Puscus, Boscreege, Gulval. Above, plan; below, profile at A-B. Narrow hatching, walling in situ; wide hatching, drain covers; cross-hatching, hearth surround.

Slightly south-west of the centre of the hut is a hearth. This is formed by a flat stone 2 ft. square, surrounded on three sides by a curb of smaller stones 5 in. to 7 in. high, set vertically, the gaps between them being packed with clay. The curb stones are much cracked by burning, but the central slab shows only a slight discoloration and was probably a late insertion, since there was a quantity of heavily charcoal-flecked soil and rab beneath it.

A drain runs right across the hut from the entrance on the west side, curving round the north side of the hearth, and out through a break in the wall on the east side. It is a U-shaped channel, cut 5 in. deep into the rab, and is about 1 ft. wide except at the east

end where it widens to 1 ft. 6 in. Seven cover stones were in position over it. It was filled with a brown silt containing a great deal of charcoal, particularly in the bottom two inches. It seems likely that this drain is contemporary with or later than the rebuilding of the entrance, since it comes from the centre of the *narrowed* doorway, and the stone lying across it at this point, which is much larger than any of the other surviving cover-stones, would serve also as a step for this part of the entrance only. It may also be suggested that the break through the hut wall on the east side, whose only apparent object is to let the drain through, was made at the same time.

A smaller drain runs round the north half of the floor close to the wall, and empties into the first near the east side. It is about 6 in. wide and 3 in. deep, and most of the cover-stones are still in position. Its filling also contained charcoal but in smaller quantities.

There is no evidence as to the method of roofing the hut. No postholes were found. A depression 9 in. by 11 in. by 2 in. deep, under the north-east corner of the hearth stone, might mark the position of a central post in the earlier phase, though it seems quite inadequate for the only support of the roof.

The floor has been cut or worn right down to the rab. This slopes down from the north side to the centre, and elsewhere is roughly level. The layer immediately above this consisted of about an inch of mixed soil and rab, suggesting considerable trampling of the surface, and containing a great deal of charcoal particularly in the north half opposite the open side of the hearth. Finds in this layer (see Appendix) consisted of 37 sherds, a slate spindle-whorl, and several small water-worn pebbles. Four sherds from one pot and a flint scraper were found in the central drain. Unstratified above the floor were a granite muller, a grit hone, and many more pebbles. A single sherd and part of a saddle quern were found unstratified outside the entrance.

The stones in the south inner face of the wall, and many of the small stones found in the filling, show signs of burning. It may be that the hut was destroyed by fire, or it may be the result of swaling at a time when the hut was only partially filled up.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### APPENDIX: THE FINDS (Fig. 9.)

##### FLINT AND STONE

- A Beach pebble of grit or siltstone, used as a hone; transverse marks of sharpening, and traces of a ferruginous deposit on both surfaces. From floor of hut, unstratified.
- B Scraper of dull grey flint, the bulbar face slightly calcined, The nose has been reduced, by long use, to a matt polish. From filling of main (central) drain.
- C Spindle-whorl of altered slate, with slightly eccentric perforation, biconical, and worn oval. From floor of hut.

##### POTTERY

The sherds are all remarkably similar, allowing for occasional wear of surfaces, and discoloration due to burning. The fabric varies from light to mid-brown, and contains a medium-sized granitic grit, with some additional material that seems to be crushed shell. In the fresh state, the outer surfaces are a lightish dull brown, rarely oxidised to a reddish tinge, and the inner surfaces generally the mid- to dark brown associated with reduction (vessels fired in the inverted position). A slow wheel or turntable was probably used to finish off the jars. Unless otherwise indicated, all sherds come from the floor of the hut, in the occupation layer.

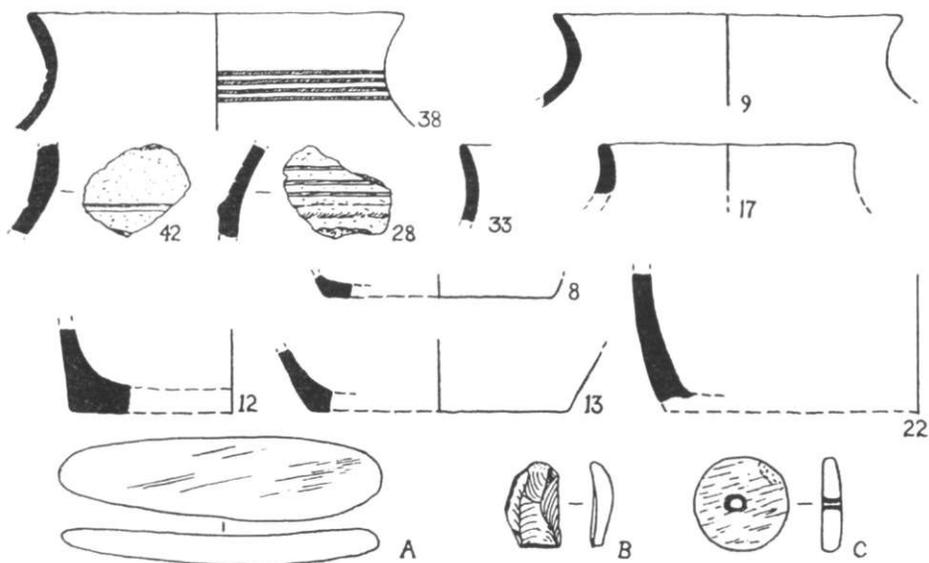


Fig. 9 Puscus, Boscreege, Gulval: the finds (Scale: 1/3).

- 38 Neck and rim of thin jar, decorated with four shallow grooves. From filling of main drain.
- 9 Neck and rim of similar jar, plain.
- 17 Rim of small jar with constricted neck.
- 33 Similar rim, rather delicate and thin fabric.
- 28 Sherd from shoulder of globular (?) jar, with three shallow grooves and a vestigial shoulder cordon tooled out from the surface.
- 42 Sherd from lower neck of similar jar, with single shallow groove. From outside S. wall of hut, on the rab.
- 8 Very thin base of small jar.
- 12 Eroded and rather coarse base, perhaps of no. 28.
- 13 Base of a jar, perhaps no. 38 or no. 9.
- 22 Base of a large jar, perhaps as for no. 42.

#### COMMENTS

The outstanding facet of this poverty-stricken assemblage is the apparent existence of only one pottery form, the jar with a sub-globular body, curved shoulder, constricted neck, and flaring or near-vertical rim. The single ornamental device is the shallow groove done with a blunt bone or wood point. In general terms, this pottery lies within the native repertoire of West Cornwall during the Roman period. Any estimate of date on so little material is bound to be an estimate, and nothing more, but the absence of any early features except the vestigial shoulder cordon (no. 28), the smooth curve and thinness of the jar rims, and the grooved decoration (cf. Porth Godrevy, *CA I* (1962), 49, fig. 12) suggest that this is in the middle of the Roman period, and a personal preference indicates the 3rd century A.D. rather than the 2nd. The actual jars were perhaps obtained from some nearby Courtyard House, rather than made *in situ*. A.C.T.