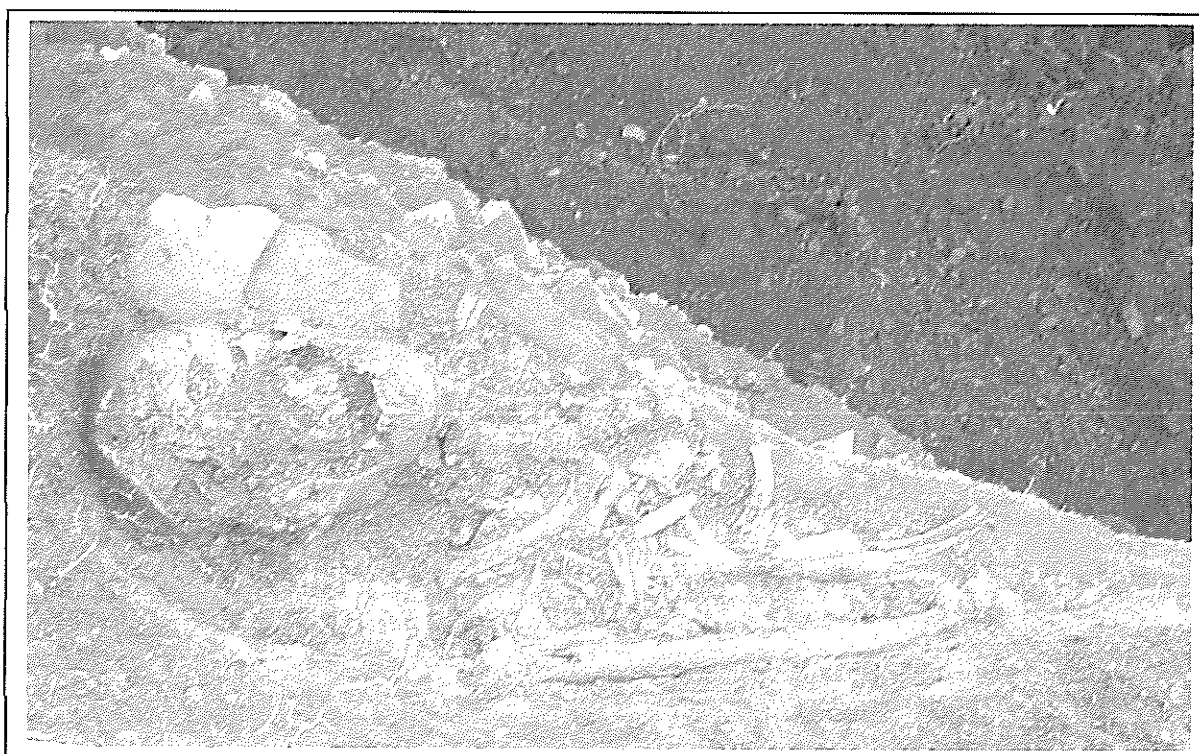


# **BURIALS AT NARBERTH CASTLE PEMBROKESHIRE**

2001 EXCAVATION



Report No. 2002/50

Report Prepared for:  
PEMBROKESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL/SPARC



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CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

REPORT NO. 2002/50  
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BURIALS AT NARBERTH CASTLE, PEMBROKESHIRE

By

K Murphy and P Crane

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# **BURIALS AT NARBERTH CASTLE, PEMBROKESHIRE**

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## **BURIALS AT NARBERTH CASTLE, PEMBROKESHIRE**

by K Murphy and P Crane

### **Summary**

*The discovery of at least 20 east - west aligned extended inhumations 30m to the north of the standing remains of Narberth Castle is described. It is likely that the burials are part of a much larger cemetery. Inter-cutting graves suggest that the cemetery was in use for a considerable period of time. Pottery and a single radiocarbon date demonstrate a late 12<sup>th</sup> century – 13<sup>th</sup> century date for the burials. It is tentatively suggested that the cemetery indicates the former location of a church prior to its establishment on its current site 180m to the west, perhaps in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century when the castle was rebuilt in stone.*

### **Introduction**

In April 1996, during the course of survey work at Narberth Castle (NGR SN10981440), that was itself part of the preliminary stages of a conservation programme, staff of Cambria Archaeology noted what appeared to be two graves exposed towards the top of a steep slope. The slope ran down to the rear gardens of properties in Castle Terrace, immediately to the north of the castle, and had been recently cutback to an almost vertical profile, so exposing the burials. A request for grant-aid to excavate the exposed burials was made to Cadw. This was approved on the basis that match-funding from the castle conservation budget (now managed by PLANED – Pembrokeshire Local Action Network for Enterprise and Development) would be available. Funds from PLANED were not available until late in 2001, when it was decided that, as well as excavating the exposed burials, archaeological monitoring during mechanical excavation of large post-holes would be undertaken. The work was undertaken in December 2001.

### **History**

Ludlow (forthcoming) has undertaken a comprehensive history and structural analysis of Narberth Castle. The following synopsis is from his report. Narberth Castle was an Anglo-Norman foundation, probably established between 1093 and 1116, although the first reference to it does not occur until 1116, when it was burnt by the followers of Gruffydd ap Rhys. However, for much of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the castle remained in the hands of Anglo-Norman lords. In 1215, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth burnt the castle, and again in 1220. From 1220, William Marshall II held the castle until his death in 1247, when it passed to Roger Mortimer. The castle was again destroyed, this time in 1257 by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. The nature of the castle at the time of Marshall's death in 1247 is not known, but structural analysis indicates a broad mid 13<sup>th</sup> century date for the earliest masonry castle. By the time of Mortimer's death in 1282 Narberth Castle would have been completely built of stone. In 1424, the castle was 'in a state of decay' from which it never recovered, although it was fortified with a ravelin during the English Civil War.

### **Topography**

Narberth Castle lies on a steep-sided knoll at 80m to 85m above sea level at the south end of the Narberth town. The burials lie on the northern edge of the knoll 30m to the north of the upstanding masonry remains of the castle – the northwest tower and northeast tower. In this area the knoll comprises a plateau with steep sides down to the west, north and east. Modern access, and it is assumed medieval access, to the knoll is by a gently sloping ramp to the north. It seems likely that the slopes flanking the plateau north of the

upstanding masonry remains have been artificially steepened as part of the castle's defensive circuit, and that, therefore, the plateau in which the burials were placed was an outer bailey. Earth-built hedge-banks have been built on the plateau, one of which overlay the burials where it, and they, had been cut-back over the steep north-facing slope.

### **The excavation and archaeological monitoring**

The hedge-bank overlying the exposed burials was removed by machine and an area approximately 3m by 1m cleared of overburden and topsoil (101) – Trench 1 ( Figs 1 and 2). It was immediately apparent that there were many more than the two burials readily visible in the cut-back slope. Immediately below the topsoil lay a small, shallow grave, 126, 0.30m by 0.15 and 0.12m deep, and aligned with its long axis roughly west-southwest to east-northeast. The skeleton was not well preserved, but its size and grave dimensions suggested a perinatal infant. Two large stones incorporated in the grave fill may have acted as part of a grave marker. The infant grave cut grave 110. The other eight graves in the trench had been truncated by the cut-back slope. All were of adult size, and all were aligned roughly west to east. Bone preservation in several of the graves was not good. Skulls, where they survived, were at the west ends. Graves 102 and 110 had large stones at their head ends, perhaps as markers. There was a clear sequence of grave digging. Grave 110 was the earliest identifiable grave in Trench 1; it was cut by both the infant grave 126 and by grave 105. Grave 105 was cut by grave 102 which was cut by grave 123. The stratigraphic sequence of the other graves was not clear during excavation. Grave 110 contained the best-preserved skeleton, that of an adult, in an extended position with the left arm crossing the body and the hand resting on the right shoulder. The lower portion and left side of the body had been cut away. A radiocarbon determination from bone in grave 110 produced a date of  $843 \pm 38$  BP (UB-4784), calibrated at 2 sigma range to AD 1047 - 1264. Two sherds of Dyfed Gravel Tempered Ware pottery were incorporated in the fill of grave 110, and one sherd from each of the fills of graves 123 and 126. A single sherd of Ham Green pottery was found in the grave of 129. The pottery is discussed in greater detail below. The locally produced Dyfed Gravel Tempered Ware was produced from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century through to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Ham Green pottery from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Graves were discovered in four of the large machine-excavated post-holes to the east of Trench 1 (Figs. 1 and 3), which measured c. 3.5 m by 1m. The machine excavation was to have been carried out in stages, with the topsoil first carefully removed to allow for the archaeological examination of the upper surfaces of the underlying deposits. Graves were apparent immediately below the 0.15m – 0.20m thick topsoil. Owing to the density of graves only the topsoil was stripped from the post-holes and the construction of a fence abandoned. In its place an earth bank topped by a hedge was created. In the two easternmost of the post-holes the tops of three graves cut into Ordovician shale were recorded. The nature of the soil in the two westernmost post-holes indicated that several inter-cutting graves were present; a skull close to the surface was noted in one of the pits. None of the graves in these post-holes was excavated.

Trench 2, measuring c. 1.6m by 1m, was opened to the north of the post-holes found to contain graves (Fig. 3). Along the southern edge of the trench parts of two graves were recorded cut into bedrock. The northern two-thirds of the trench consisted of a dark soil fill, probably of several inter-cutting graves, with stones marking the position of two

graves. Excavation of a darker stain in the centre of the trench revealed an east-west extended inhumation. Only long bones survived. The skeleton was not lifted and no further excavation was undertaken.

A post-hole for an entrance gate southwest of Trench 1 cut through an east-west extended inhumation and exposed the surface of a second grave to the north. Topsoil was 0.08m thick, and the base of the grave just 0.18m below the ground surface. Bone preservation was not good, with left side leg long bones and part of one arm surviving.

### **Pottery**

by D Brennan

A total of eleven sherds of medieval pottery, and five sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered from the excavation. The medieval material consists of sherds from locally produced handmade cooking pots in a fabric identified as Dyfed Gravel Tempered Ware (O'Mahoney 1985). Four sherds were found in graves (110, 123, 126) and another four were recovered from a topsoil/hedge-bank (101). Non-local material consisted of sherds from handmade glazed jugs imported from the Ham Green area of Bristol (Barton 1963). Of these, one sherd came from the fill of a grave (129), and another two were from the topsoil/hedge-bank (101).

A survey of medieval ceramics in Wales briefly discusses the forms, fabrics, dating and distribution of wares which fall within the Dyfed or West Wales pottery tradition (Papazian & Campbell 1992, 56-59). The dating of locally produced pottery is problematical as there is still no chronological type series available. As with other west Wales ceramic collections, the association of late 12th - early 13th century Ham Green Wares provides the only means of dating for its early phase of production.

The association of locally made medieval pottery with imported Ham Green wares has been observed at a number of excavated sites including Cardigan Castle (O'Mahoney, in Murphy 1985, 205), Newport (Brennan & Murphy 1996, 1) and Carmarthen Greyfriars (O'Mahoney 1998). This recurring pattern of association is good evidence to suggest a late 12th or early 13th century date for the earliest production of local wares.

The post-medieval pottery consists of two sherds from 17th -18th century North Devon gravel-tempered vessels and three sherds from miscellaneous wares of 19th century date. All five sherds were from post-medieval deposits.

Table 1. Total number of sherds by fabric in complete assemblage

Context	Ham Green Med	'Dyfed' GTW Med	N. Devon GTW 17th/18th cent.	Misc. wares 19th cent.	Total Sherds
Topsoil/hedge 101	2	4	2		8
Grave 110		1			1
Grave 110, upper fill 122		1			1
Grave 123		1			1
Grave 126		1			1
Grave 129	1				1
Topsoil –posthole 138				1	1
Topsoil –posthole 139				2	2
Topsoil –posthole 140					0
<b>Total sherds fabric</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>

Abbreviations: GTW = Gravel-tempered ware.

Table 2. Absolute minimum of vessels by form and fabric

Ham Green Jugs	'Dyfed' GTW cooking pots	N. Devon GTW Misc.	19th cent. Misc.	TOTAL
2	1	2	3	8

### Radiocarbon date

Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, Queen's University Belfast, obtained a single radiocarbon date from bone from grave 110. Datasets published by Stuiver and Pearson (1986) have been used to calibrate the date.

Lab. No.	Date BP	Minimum and maximum calibrated age ranges at two sigma
UB-4784	843±38 BP	cal AD 1047 - 1264

### Discussion

Over 20 east-west aligned inhumation graves were recorded in a 20m long east-west band. The consistent east-west alignment of the graves in the Christian tradition and the inter-cutting of several of them indicate a formal cemetery in use over several decades. Indeed, the tightly packed and inter-cut graves in Trench 1 suggest burials over a longer period. No boundary to the cemetery was established and therefore it is not possible to provide an estimate for the total number of burials.

The presence of shreds of Dyfed Gravel Tempered Ware clearly places the cemetery in the medieval or later period. This ware does not lend itself to precise dating, but the single sherd of Ham Green Ware with a production date of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century in grave 129 provides a clear *terminus post quem* for the burials. This evidence together with the radiocarbon date calibrated at two sigma of AD 1047 to AD

1264 from the earliest recognised grave (110) clearly demonstrates that the cemetery was in use during the late 12<sup>th</sup> century and 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The status and context of the cemetery is unclear. The pottery is of little assistance here as assemblages containing Dyfed Gravel Tempered Ware and Ham Green Ware have been found in domestic, military and ecclesiastical contexts in southwest Wales. Clearly the cemetery was in use after the foundation of the castle in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century - early 12<sup>th</sup> century. A formal cemetery at this date is normally taken as an indication of a church. It is possible that a church built immediately outside the castle gates at or soon after the castle's foundation was reestablished on its present site 180m to the west during a period of castle remodeling and expansion, perhaps when the castle was rebuilt in stone in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. This is a possible explanation as 1291 is the first reference to Narberth Church and structural evidence indicates that the present building consists mainly of 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration with earlier elements dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Ludlow 2000). There are, however, no clear comparenda for this process, and in west Wales the closest parallel is at Rudbaxton where St Leonard's Chapel was erected just outside the castle, which reused an Iron Age fort (Ludlow 2002). No parallels have been discovered for cemeteries within the baileys of castles.

### **Acknowledgements**

The excavation was funded by PLANED and Cadw. P Crane supervised the excavations with the assistance of D Schlee. K Murphy prepared this report. Thanks are due to R Tree of PLANED for his understanding and assistance during the excavation.



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## **Appendix 1. Catalogue of Finds**

**by D Brennan**

**CONTEXT:** [101] Topsoil and earth bank.  
**CATEGORY:** POTTERY

**No. sherds:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Handmade jug.  
**Fabric:** Ham Green ware (Barton 1963).  
**Surface treatment:** Light green external glaze with band/zone of darker olive green.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** Bristol area.  
**Date:** Medieval, late 12th/early 13th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**No. sherds:** 1 base.  
**Form:** Handmade jug.  
**Fabric:** Ham Green ware (Barton 1963).  
**Surface treatment:** Thin olive green external glaze with specks of glaze on interior.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** Bristol area.  
**Date:** Medieval, late 12th/early 13th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**No. sherds:** 3 body, 1 base.  
**Form:** Handmade cooking pots/jars.  
**Fabric:** 'Local' (Dyfed) gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed.  
**Decoration:** One body sherd has two deeply scored horizontal grooves.  
**Source:** West Wales.  
**Date:** Medieval.  
**No. vessels:** 3

**No. sherds:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Indeterminate, wheel-thrown.  
**Fabric:** North Devon gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Brown internal glaze.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** North Devon.  
**Date:** Post-medieval, 17th/18th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**No. sherds:** 1 base.  
**Form:** Wheel-thrown jar or bowl form.  
**Fabric:** North Devon gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Olive green internal glaze.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** North Devon.  
**Date:** Post-medieval, 17th/18th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CATEGORY:** IRON.

**No. frags:** 1  
**Object type:** 1 nail.  
**Details:** Short cut-clasp nail with square-sectioned shank. Length extant 36mm.  
**Date:** Post-medieval ?.

**CONTEXT: Grave 110 (fill 112)**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 rim.  
**Form:** Handmade cooking pot/jar. Too little survives to determine rim profile. Dia. 16cms+.  
**Fabric:** 'Local' (Dyfed) gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** West Wales.  
**Date:** Medieval.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CONTEXT: Grave 110 ( upper fill 122)**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Handmade cooking pot/jar.  
**Fabric:** 'Local' (Dyfed) gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** West Wales.  
**Date:** Medieval.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CONTEXT: Grave 123**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 body/base?.  
**Form:** Handmade cooking pot.  
**Fabric:** 'Local' (Dyfed) gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed, fire-blackened internally.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** West Wales.  
**Date:** Medieval.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CONTEXT: Grave 126 (fill 128)**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Handmade cooking pot/jar.  
**Fabric:** 'Local' (Dyfed) gravel-tempered ware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** West Wales.  
**Date:** Medieval.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CONTEXT: Grave 129 (fill 132)**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Handmade jug.  
**Fabric:** Ham Green (Barton 1963)  
**Surface treatment:** Olive green external glaze, partially sooted.  
**Decoration:** Shallow horizontal grooves.  
**Source:** Bristol area.  
**Date:** Medieval, late 12th/early 13th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CONTEXT: Topsoil – post pit 138**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 damaged rim.  
**Form:** Plate/dish.  
**Fabric:** Developed whiteware.  
**Surface treatment:** Clear glaze.  
**Decoration:** Traces of blue transfer-print.  
**Source:** Staffordshire is likely.  
**Date:** Post-medieval, late 19th or 20th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CATEGORY: STONE**

**No. frags:** 1 unworked.

**CONTEXT: Topsoil – post pit 139**  
**CATEGORY: POTTERY**

**No. sherds:** 1 rim.  
**Form:** Plant pot.  
**Fabric:** Red earthenware.  
**Surface treatment:** Unglazed.  
**Decoration:** None.  
**Source:** Unsourced.  
**Date:** Post-medieval, 19th or 20th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**No. sherds:** 1 damaged body/base.  
**Form:** Plate/dish.  
**Fabric:** Developed whiteware.  
**Surface treatment:** Light blue-tinted glaze.  
**Decoration:** Close-set concentric grooves on the one surviving surface.  
**Source:** Staffordshire is likely.  
**Date:** Post-medieval, late 19th or 20th century.  
**No. vessels:** 1

**CATEGORY: GLASS**

**No. frags:** 1 body.  
**Form:** Wine bottle of 'cylindrical' form.  
**Details:** Olive green with incipient iridescent surface weathering.  
**Source:** Bristol is likely.  
**Date:** 19th century.

**CATEGORY: COPPER ALLOY**

**No. frags:** 1  
**Object type:** Coin.  
**Details:** One Victorian penny.  
**Date:** 1891.

**CONTEXT: Topsoil – post pit 140**  
**CATEGORY: CLAY PIPE**

**No. frags: 1**

**Details: One plain stem fragment.**

**Date: Post-medieval, a 19th century date is likely.**

## **Appendix 2. Archive Deposition**

The following material has been deposited with Pembrokeshire Museum, Scolton Manor, Haverfordwest

Copy of final report.

Site records, including context record sheets and correspondence.

Drawing catalogue and site drawings.

Site photographs - catalogue, colour slide and CD of digital photographs

Finds catalogue, individual finds record and finds report.

Specialists' reports – finds and radiocarbon.

Box of Finds.

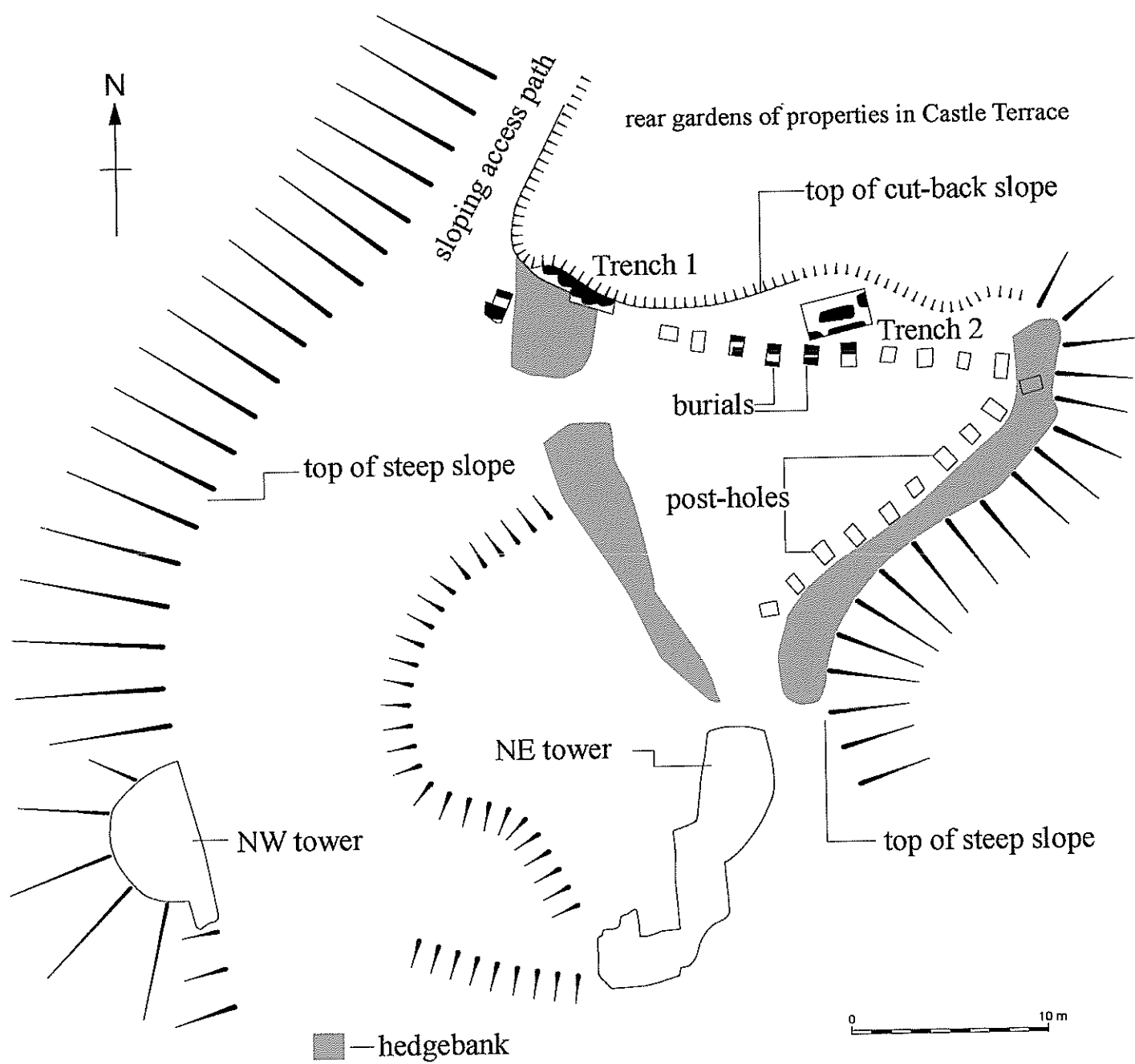
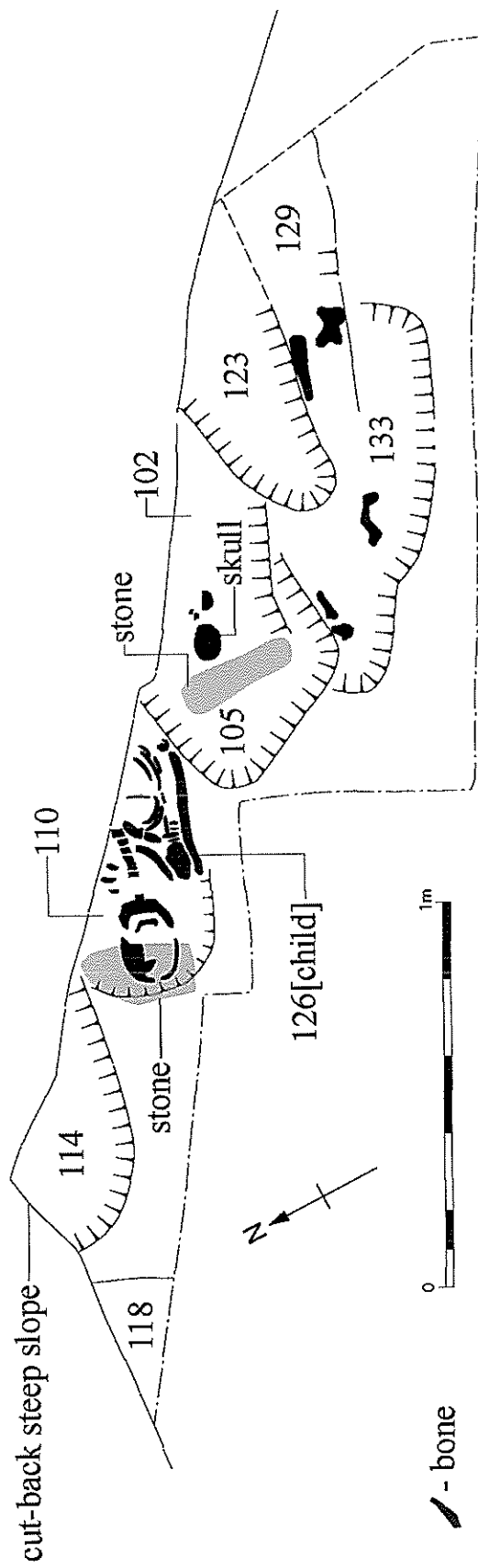


Fig.1

Fig.2



Plan and section of Trench1

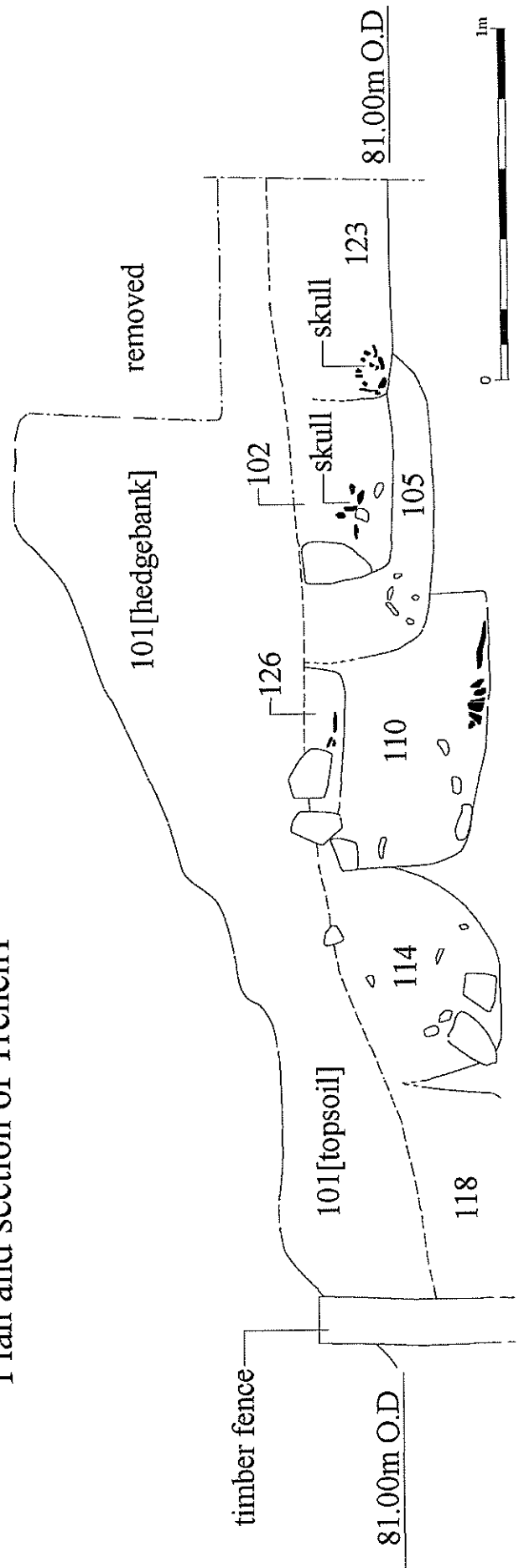
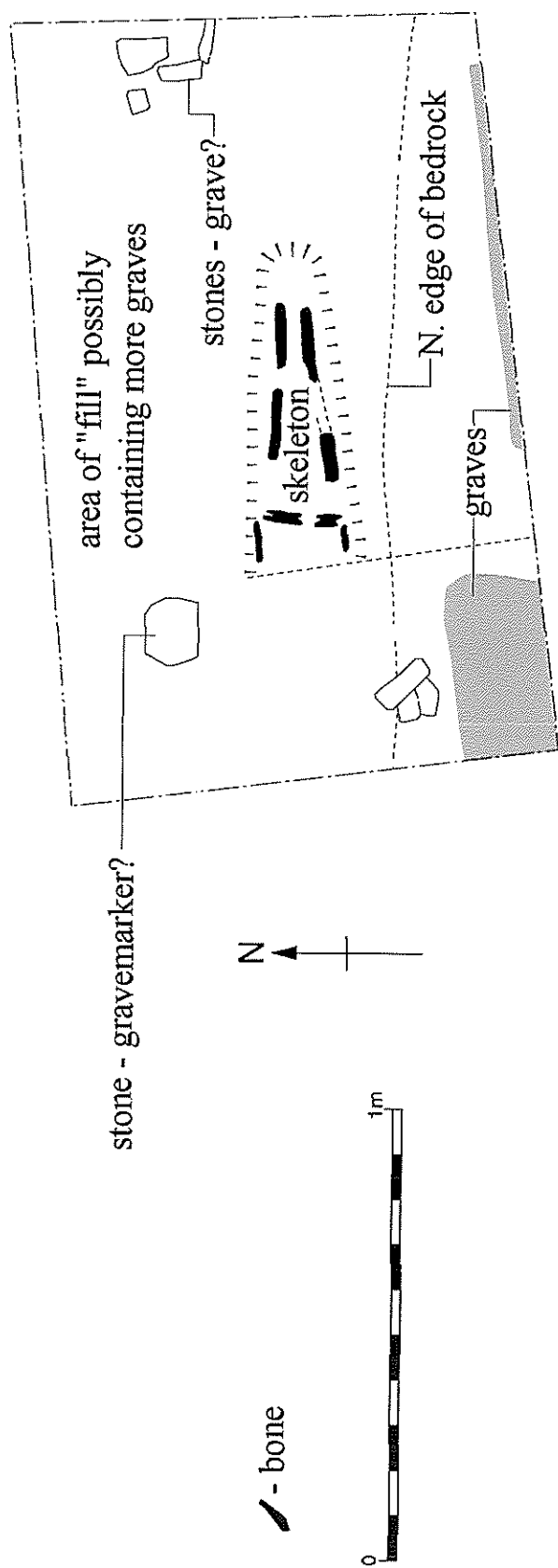
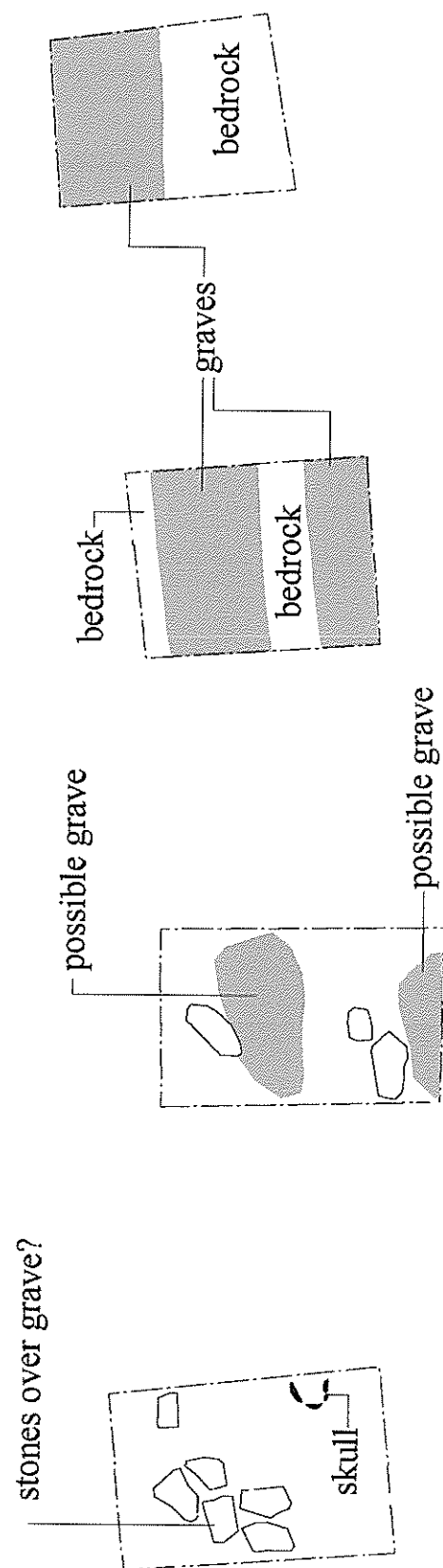




Fig.3



Plan of Trench 2 and adjacent post-holes



# BURIALS AT NARBERTH CASTLE, PEMBROKESHIRE

REPORT NUMBER 200250

JUNE 2002

This report has been prepared by K Murphy and P Crane

Position Principal Archaeologist and Project Manager

Signature  Date 26 June 2002

This report has been checked and approved by G Hughes on behalf of Cambria Archaeology,  
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position Trust Director

Signature  Date 26/6/02

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may have  
on the content or presentation of this report