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A BURIAL FROM THE CIST CEMETERY AT CROESGOCH, PEMBROKESHIRE

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A BURIAL FROM THE CIST CEMETERY AT CROESGOCH,
PEMBROKESHIRE

By

Neil Ludlow

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A BURIAL FROM THE CIST CEMETERY AT CROESGOCH, PEMBROKESHIRE

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A BURIAL FROM THE CIST CEMETERY AT CROESGOCH, PEMBROKESHIRE

1.0 Summary

A field named 'Parc-y-fynwent' (ie. 'cemetery field'), at Croesgoch, Llanrhian parish, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 827 302), has from time-to-time revealed evidence for the presence of long-cist burials. A cist disturbed by groundworks for a housing development, in 2000, contained an extended Christian inhumation that produced radiocarbon dates of cal AD 370 – 600, at 2 sigma range. This is by far the earliest date yet obtained from a west Wales long-cist burial. It lies within the late Roman and early post Roman period of Irish settlement which, in west Wales, is associated with the erection of Group I Early Christian Monuments. These have a similar distribution pattern to long-cist cemeteries, but dated cists have hitherto produced rather later dates - albeit from a small sample. No cemetery enclosure has yet been located at Croesgoch but a chapel - as yet unlocated - is recorded here during the post-Conquest period, suggesting a persistence of sanctity if not of burial.

2.0 Site location

Two stone-lined graves – or 'cist burials' – were observed during groundworks for a housing development in November 2000 (PRN 46919). The development occupies what was formerly a small field of pasture (OS field number 6829, NGR SM 827 302), which lies immediately north of the junction between the A487(T) and the unclassified road to Abereddy, in the village of Croesgoch, Llanrhian parish, Pembrokeshire. The field is named, significantly, 'Parc-y-fynwent' or 'cemetery field'.

The site occupies the northern edge of a plateau, 107m above sea level. The red-brown, silty clay ploughsoil lies above a clayey, weathered Ordovician shale subsoil, grey to orange-brown in colour, much affected by cryoturbation and exhibiting some periglacial features.

Fig. 1: Croesgoch - location map



3.0 Site history and description

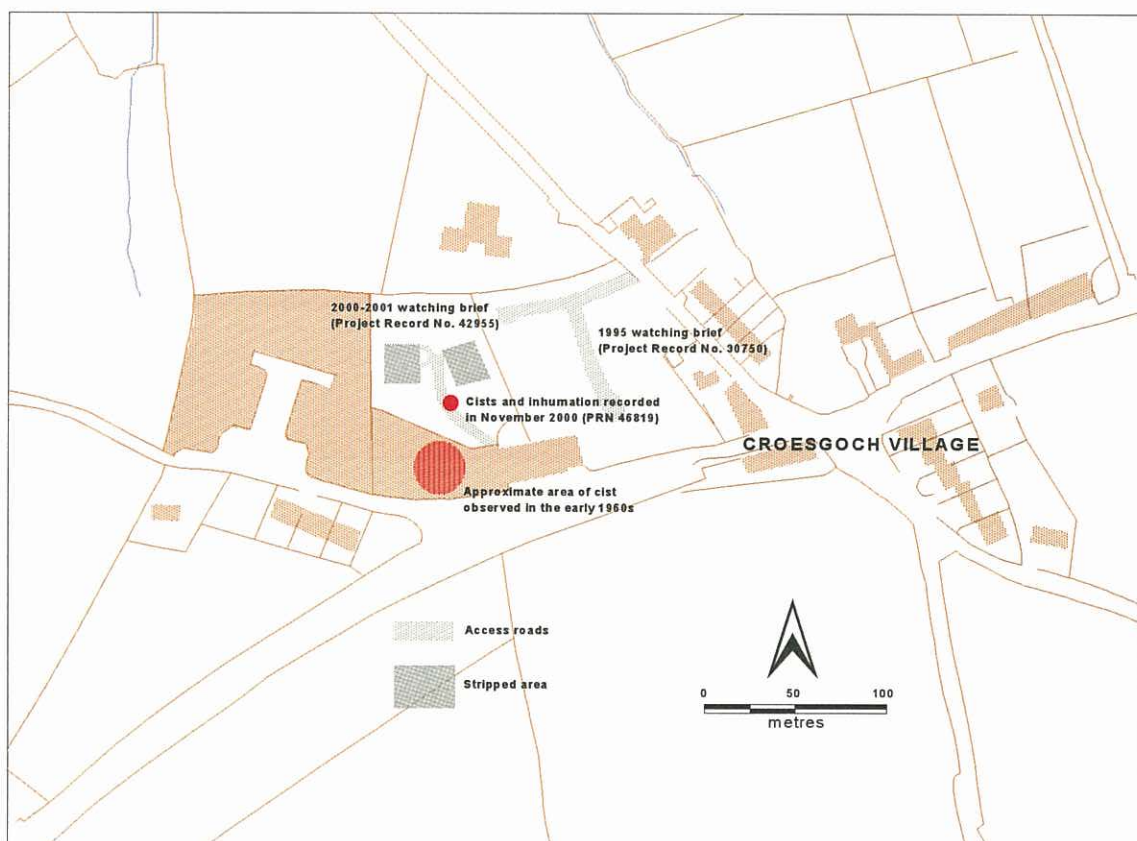
The former presence of a medieval chapel (PRN 12840) and cemetery (overall PRNs 2836 and 7568) at Croesgoch has long been known. Medieval sources (summarised by Rees, 1932) indicate the presence of a chapel and later antiquarian sources (Fenton 1811, 36; Jones and Freeman 1886, 229) document the presence of burials on the site. The Pembrokeshire Archaeological Survey of 1897-1906 states that cist burials and bone had been observed within the area (Laws and Owen, 33/9). The exact location of the chapel building is not known.

Fenton's account described the site as 'covered with graves marked out by stone coffins, formed of the coarse purple flags from the quarries in the neighbouring cliffs'. One of the coffins contained an inhumation which was apparently accompanied by a 'sword', but Fenton does not mention the material from which it was made. He states that the site was at Trevigan, 0.5km to the south, but all authorities agree that the Croesgoch site is meant.

Antiquarian descriptions do not make it clear whether the cists were Christian burials, which are properly termed 'long-cists' to distinguish them from the smaller, stone-lined burials that occur in pre-Christian contexts, are oriented east-west and contain extended, supine inhumations. Recent observations suggest that the cemetery was Christian, and medieval, but Fenton's 'sword' strikes an odd note in this context.

The extent of the cemetery is not known. It may or may not have been enclosed – none of the present field boundaries appear to reflect any ecclesiastical enclosure, and no evidence for an enclosure is visible in the field or on aerial photographs. Laws and Owen mark the site with a tumulus symbol but there is no other evidence that any mound was ever present (Laws and Owen, 33/9).

Fig. 2: Map of Croesgoch showing recent observations



4.0 Recent observations

A cist burial was observed in OS field number 6829 (Parc-y-fynwent) during the construction of housing at the south end of the field, at NGR SM 826 302, in the early 1960s (Williams 1995, 3; Fig. 2). A watching brief was undertaken, in 1995, on groundworks for the access roads of a further housing development – Crofty Close - in OS field number 7729 (NGR SM 827 303), immediately east of Parc-y-fynwent (Williams 1995, DAT Project Record No. 30750). However, no archaeological features were observed (Fig. 2).

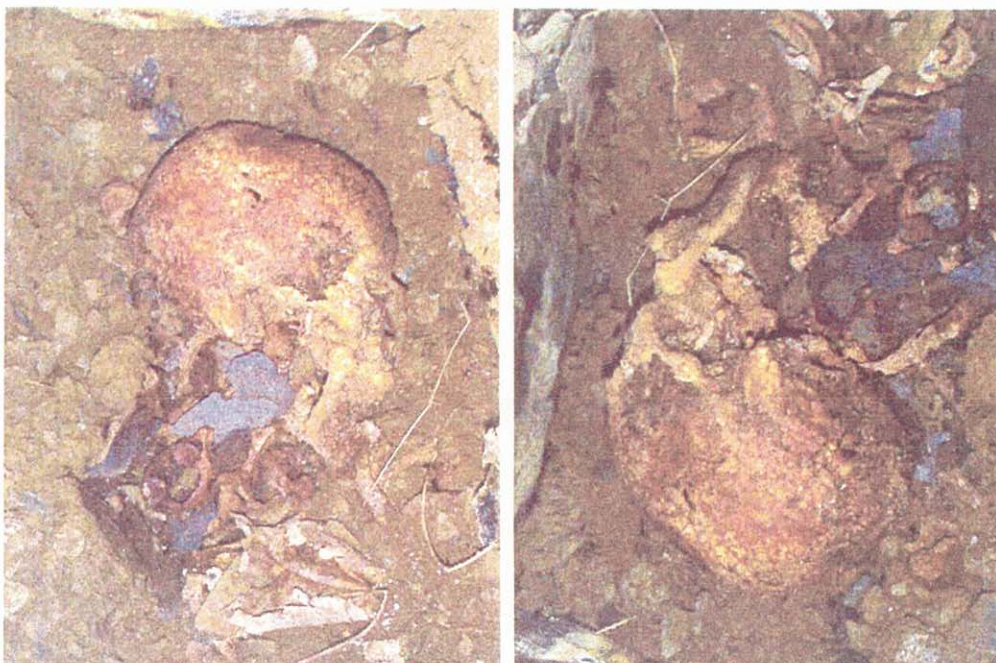
Permission for the housing development in the northern half of Parc-y-fynwent field had first been applied for in 1982, but for various reasons the building work was not undertaken. Groundworks for the development access roads, commenced in November 2000, revealed two oriented long-cist burials, at NGR SM 82681 30278 (Fig. 2). One of the cists (with the separate PRN 46819) was disturbed by machining. The lintel slabs were displaced, exposing an extended supine inhumation (Fig. 3). The police were informed, and Pembrokeshire Museums Service were contacted. The contractors removed the bone, in order that it could be collected by Pembrokeshire Museums Service. Cambria Archaeology was also contacted and on 10 November, Pete Crane visited the site in order to record the cists (Crane 2000). The area was had-cleaned with a shovel down to the weathered shale subsoil. A lintel stone of the second cist grave was revealed 0.75m north of the first cist. However, in the absence of the burial, and after machine disturbance, it was clearly impossible to fully record the burial. No further cists were observed in the sections of the access roads, nor were any seen in the several electricity supply trenches that were also excavated, but the conditions under which the recording was undertaken mean that simple dug graves, ie. without cists, may have been present but were not observed. Furthermore, a number of large, flat stones were observed in the backfill of a water-supply trench, which may have been derived from further cists.

Further construction work was undertaken in the eastern half of this development, at NGR SM 8270 3229, in Summer 2001 (Fig. 2). The topsoil and foundation strips were attended by Lucy Rowley Williams, of Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, on 23 May and 2 July 2001 (Rowley-Williams 2001; Project Record No. 42955). No features were observed that could be interpreted as grave cuts or cist graves. The cemetery may therefore have occupied a fairly small area, concentrated within the southern half of Parc-y-fynwent field.

Fig. 3: Photograph of cist burial PRN 46819 after displacement of lintel slabs



Fig. 4: Cist burial PRN 46819 - the skull in situ



5.0 Inhumation PRN 46819 and radiocarbon dates

The degree of stone slabbing within long-cists can be variable. The terminology normally used was established by Charles Thomas (Thomas 1971, 49), in which a simple body length hollow is termed a 'dug grave'; burials with stone linings, or with slabs at the base or head are termed 'cist graves', and those slabbed at base, head, foot and with covering slabs are termed 'lintel graves'. The cist containing the Croesgoch inhumation PRN 46819 was a completely slabbed lintel cist; of the second cist observed in 2000 only the lintel slabs were seen.

Neither the cist slabs nor the inhumation were fully recorded *in situ*, but the burial was photographed while still within the cist (Figs. 3 and 4). All the bone that was present was observed and retrieved by Pembrokeshire Museums Service, and appears to be from one individual although it is not possible to determine whether the burial was disturbed prior to their arrival. The sample suggests that it was an adult burial, and comprises 0.6kg of bone predominantly represented by the skull. This was in relatively good condition, including the (disarticulated) lower jaw, with many teeth remaining, although both zygomatic arches have gone (Fig. 5). A large hole in the left-hand side of the cranium is a fresh break and has occurred *post-mortem*, quite probably as a result of machine disturbance in 2001. The remainder of the inhumation comprised a small number of short bones and bone fragments; no long bones were present. The site photograph shows the short bones all clustered around the base of the skull (Fig. 3), but again it is not known if the burial was interfered with after exposure. The bone was subject to a brief analysis by Dr Ros Coard of Lampeter University. The skull was that of a male, aged 50+. It had suffered some *ante-mortem* damage. The right side of the cranium had been punctured through a blow or a fall, but had healed prior to death (Fig. 5). The lower molars were heavily abscessed, that on the right side having healed with the loss of the tooth. It was not possible to confirm that the short bones belonged to the same skeleton.

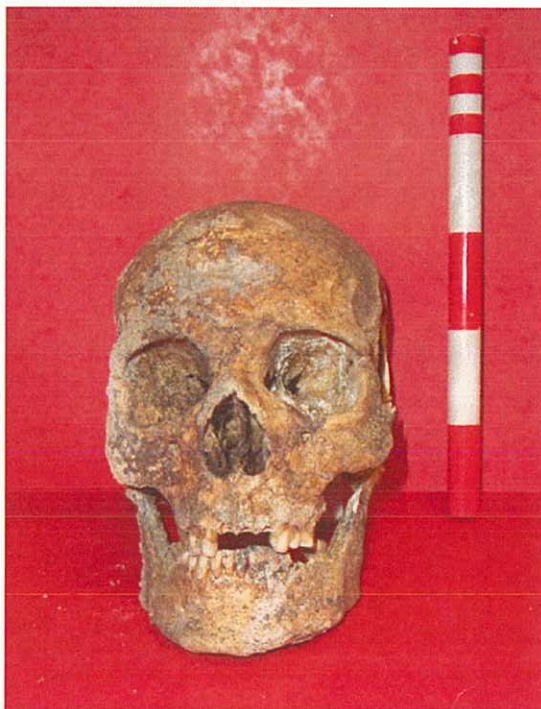
A sample, comprising 2 grammes of the small bones, was submitted for radiocarbon dating by Beta Analytical, Miami, Florida, USA (see Appendix I). Due to the restricted amount of bone available, Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) dating was employed. Two dates were obtained. At 2 sigma calibration, the dates were –

Beta sample 177038 - Cal AD 410 to 600 (Cal BP 1540 to 1350)

Beta sample 177039 - Cal AD 370 to 540 (Cal BP 1580 to 1410)

The dates lie within the late Roman – early post-Roman period. They span 230 years, with a 130-year overlap, and so the small disparity between the dates, of bone that appears to represent a single individual, not regarded as significant.

Fig. 5: Three views of the skull

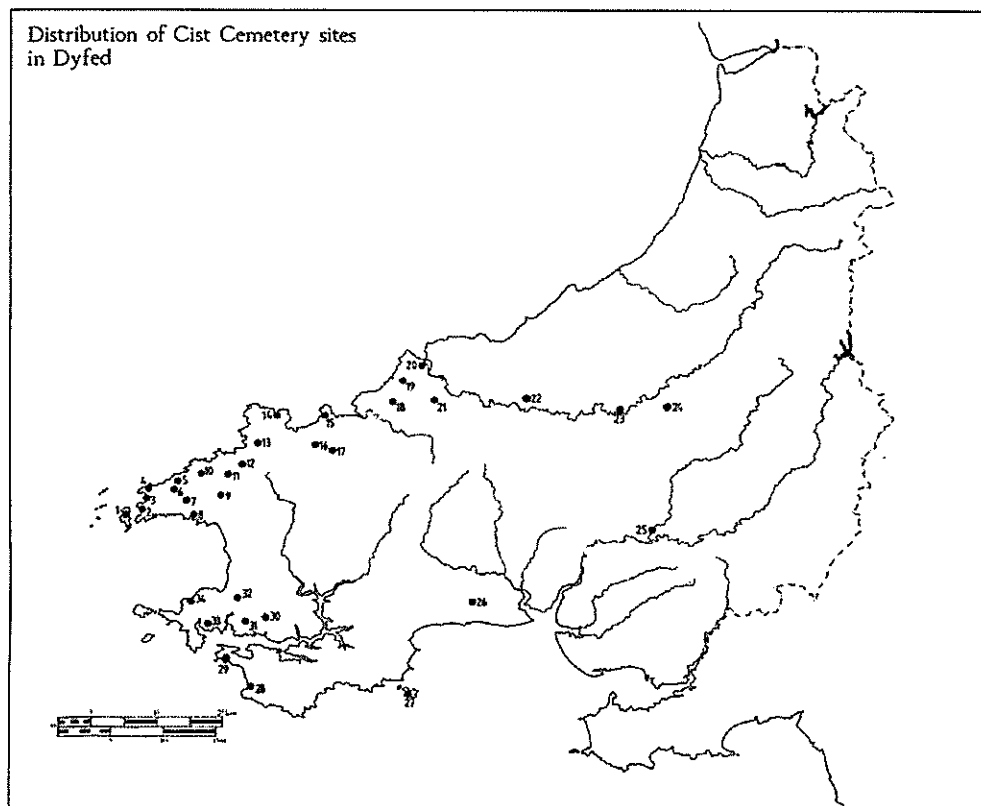


6.0 Discussion

The Sites and Monuments Record for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire lists records of 35 long-cist cemeteries or possible cemeteries in west Wales (discussed in James, 1987; see Appendix II and Fig. 6). They have usually been chance observations and there is normally little indication of their date; at the time of writing, only six have produced any form of absolute dating evidence. Two of these dates - at Cilgerran and Eglwyswrrw - are post-Conquest (Ludlow forthcoming). Excavations at Eglwyswrrw churchyard, in 1996, revealed forty-six medieval inhumations. The fills of two of the cist graves, and a feature cut by one of the dug graves, produced pottery dateable to the late 12th - 13th century at the earliest. A cist grave at Cilgerran churchyard, opened in the mid 19th century, contained 13th century coins (Anon. 1859, 350). Meanwhile, the re-use of a Group II Early Christian Monument (ECM) as a lintel-slab over an undated cist at St Patrick's Chapel, St Davids (Hague 1970, 47), suggests a later rather than earlier date. Some excavated long cist cemeteries have, in England, produced almost exclusively post-Conquest dates, for instance the 11th-16th-century cemetery at Winchester Cathedral (Kjølbye-Biddle 1975, 87-108). The tradition was remarkably persistent in Scotland, too, represented by 13th-14th century cists at Jedburgh Abbey (Youngs *et al.* 1985, 220-221), and possibly at Iona (Reece 1981, 104), while similar post-Conquest dates have been suggested in Cornwall (Preston-Jones 1984, 157-177). Moreover the presence of 'headstones' at the cemetery site on Ramsey Island (one of them a re-used 8th-9th century inscribed stone) suggests a post-medieval cist tradition that has been alluded to by, *inter alia*, Charles Thomas (Heather James, *pers. comm.*)

Nevertheless, the other four dated cemetery sites in west Wales have produced pre-Conquest radiocarbon dates. A cist cutting the defensive bank at Caer, Bayvil, an 'undeveloped' cemetery site within an iron age enclosure, produced a radiocarbon date, recently calibrated to AD 650-890 at 2 sigma range (James 1987, 72 and Fig. 12, no. 18, Petts 2000, 301). A date of cal AD 880-1020 was obtained from a cist at St Brides cemetery, exposed by marine erosion (James 1987, 72 no. 34). This latter site may lie inside a large enclosure containing both the parish church and a medieval chapel. Finally, a cist from the churchyard of Llanychlwydog parish church, in association with five Group II and Group III ECMs, produced a date of cal AD 853-1004 at 1 sigma range (Murphy 1987, 88 n. 24; James 1987, 72 and Fig. 12, no. 17), but recently recalibrated to AD 810-1160 at 2 sigma range (Petts 2000, 304).

Fig. 6: Long-cist cemeteries in west Wales (from James 1987)



Croesgoch lies on the St Davids peninsula, in one of the densest concentrations of long-cist cemeteries in west Wales (James 1987, 65; Fig. 12). The other concentration occurs around the west end of Milford Haven (Fig. 6). It has long been recognised that this distribution pattern is similar to that of Group I ECMs, ie. the Latin-inscribed, Ogam-inscribed and bilingual stones of the 5th-7th centuries. The context and epigraphy of these stones is generally accepted as belonging, in the main, to late Roman or post-Roman settlement from Ireland (Edwards 2001, 17; James 1987, 64), the settlers having become Christianised soon after their arrival (Thomas 1994, 105-6). However, the post-Conquest and later pre-Conquest dates obtained from the other five west Wales cemeteries had hitherto failed to provide any firm chronological link between cist-burial and this late Roman or post-Roman settlement. The radiocarbon dates from the Croesgoch burial, which is overwhelmingly Christian in character, have a total span between 370 AD and 600 AD, and are by far the earliest dates yet recorded in a west Wales cist cemetery. However, it should be noted that due to a plateau on the calibration curve between 450 AD and 530 AD (see Appendix I), the period between the late 5th century and the mid 6th century produces wide distributions of radiocarbon dates, meaning that radiocarbon dating is not wholly reliable (Petts 2002, 27). Nevertheless, the Croesgoch dates appear to confirm the view that long-cist burial was being practiced during a period contemporary with the erection of Group I ECMs.

Taken together, the evidence from Croesgoch and Eglwyswrw conclusively demonstrates the longevity, and continuity of early medieval burial traditions in Wales, at least in north Pembrokeshire, which remained among the most persistently 'Welsh' regions of west Wales. The post-Conquest cists at Eglwyswrw exhibited varying degrees of slabbing, but a large number were fully slabbed lintel-cists identical in form to the Croesgoch cist. The form itself therefore persisted unchanged, in north Pembrokeshire, for at least 600 years.

Moreover, the cemetery at Croesgoch may itself have been a persistent feature - it appears to have provided the focus for the erection of a chapel in the post-Conquest period (PRN 12840, see above). However it is impossible, on the basis of the one dated inhumation, to know whether burial - in cists or otherwise, continuous or intermittent - persisted throughout this period, although the presence of the chapel suggests that the cemetery was at least known of.

On the face of it, therefore, the cemetery at Croesgoch appears to represent a 'developed' cemetery. These developed sites contrast with 'undeveloped' cemetery sites, ie. early cemeteries that never received a church or chapel building. Caer, Bayvil (and possibly Plas Gogerddan in Ceredigion; see Murphy 1992) is an excavated example of such an undeveloped cemetery, and similar cemeteries are suggested at a large number of sites in west Wales. However, some of these sites may have received chapel buildings, which - in the absence of built/upstanding evidence, or of proper survey - have hitherto been unrecognised. Nevertheless, the exact location of the Croesgoch chapel is unknown. Moreover there is no evidence, either in the field, from map sources or from aerial photographs, that the cemetery lay within any kind of enclosure. Burial at Parc-y-fynwent itself may therefore have ceased, or have been relocated, at an early date.

The lack of any hard boundary means that it is difficult to determine the extent of the cemetery. However, the three cists whose locations are known are all confined to Parc-y-fynwent. This suggests that the cemetery is now largely built over. However, the site is still bounded on two sides by green fields (see Fig. 2) within which geophysical survey may yet produce evidence of further burial, an enclosure boundary and maybe the medieval chapel.

7.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks to Liz MacIver of Pembrokeshire Museums Service for curating the bone sample, to Beta Analytical for the radiocarbon dates, to Cadw for grant-aiding the radiocarbon dating and the production of this report, to Dr Ros Coard of Lampeter University for examining the bone and to Lucy Rowley-Williams, Marion Mainwaring and Pete Crane of Cambria Archaeology.

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APPENDIX I

The radiocarbon calibration graphs (from Beta Analytic)

CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-20.4;lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: Beta-177038

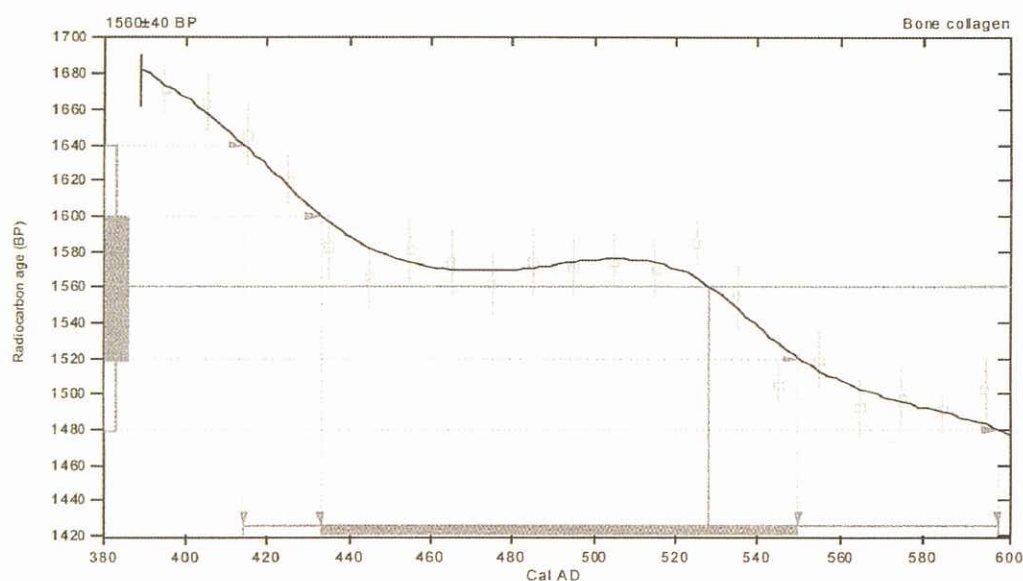
Conventional radiocarbon age: 1560±40 BP

2 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 410 to 600 (Cal BP 1540 to 1350)
(95% probability)

Intercept data

Intercept of radiocarbon age
with calibration curve: Cal AD 530 (Cal BP 1420)

1 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 430 to 550 (Cal BP 1520 to 1400)
(68% probability)



References:

Database used

INTCAL98

Calibration Database

Editorial Comment

Stuiver, M., van der Plicht, H., 1998, *Radiocarbon* 40(3), pxi-xii

INTCAL98 Radiocarbon Age Calibration

Stuiver, M., et. al., 1998, *Radiocarbon* 40(3), p1041-1083

Mathematics

A Simplified Approach to Calibrating C14 Dates

Falma, A. S., Vogel, J. C., 1993, *Radiocarbon* 35(2), p317-322

Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory

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CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-20.3;lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: Beta-177039

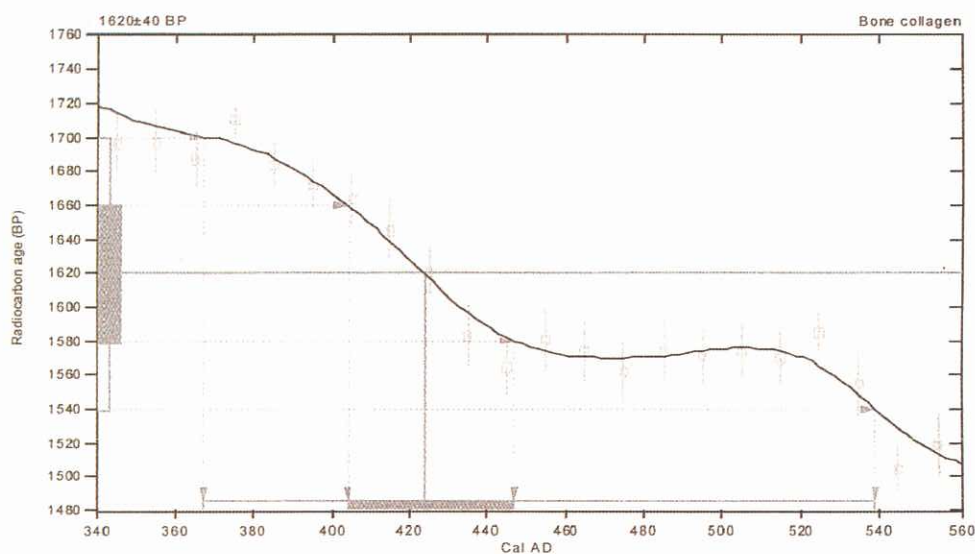
Conventional radiocarbon age: 1620±40 BP

2 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 370 to 540 (Cal BP 1580 to 1410)
(95% probability)

Intercept data

Intercept of radiocarbon age
with calibration curve: Cal AD 420 (Cal BP 1530)

1 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 400 to 450 (Cal BP 1550 to 1500)
(68% probability)



References:

Database used

INTCAL98

Calibration Database

Editorial Comment

Stuiver, M., van der Plicht, H., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), pxii-xiii

INTCAL98 Radiocarbon Age Calibration

Stuiver, M., et al., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), p1041-1083

Mathematics

A Simplified Approach to Calibrating C14 Dates

Talma, A. S., Vogel, J. C., 1993, Radiocarbon 35(2), p317-322

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APPENDIX II

Long-cist cemeteries in southwest Wales

Carmarthenshire

PRN: 5059	Eglwys Gymun Church (St Margaret)
PRN: 2163	Laugharne Church (St Martin)
PRN: 8976	Llanegwad, Salutation Inn cist grave ?cemetery (= PRN: 726 Llanegwad, Llanymhennin ?)
PRN: 1833	Llanllwni Church (St Luke or St Llonio)
PRN: 10570	Llanymbydder, Capel Iago/Hen Fynwent chapel and cist cemetery (St James)

Ceredigion

PRN: 11918	Llandyfrïog, Ffynnon Oer cist cemetery - prehistoric?
PRN: 12292	Llangoedmor, Five Beds cists - prehistoric?
PRN: 42117	Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn, Mynwent Fach ?cist cemetery
PRN: NONE	Llangwryfon, Maesllyn, cist cemetery?

Pembrokeshire

PRN: 1150	Bayvil, Caer cemetery
PRN: 4336	Llanymchlwydog Church (St David)
PRN: 46819	Llanrhian, Croesgoch, Parc-y-fynwent
PRN: 3131	St Brides Church (St Bridget/St Ffraed)
PRN: 3092	Angle, St Anthony's Chapel
PRN: 543	Castlemartin, Brownslade round barrow re-use
PRN: 1178	Cilgerran Church (St Llawddog)
PRN: 32081	Dinas Church (St Brynach)
PRN: 1428	Dinas, Bryn Henllan/?St David's chapel
PRN: 4974	Eglwyswrw Church (St Cristiolus) - post-Conquest?
PRN: 2558	Fishguard, Henfynwent ?cemetery ?
PRN: 2872	Llanwnda, Llanwnwr Chapel (St Gynyr)
PRN: 3080	Rhoscrowdder, Kilpaison Burrows round barrow re-use
PRN: 2677	St Davids, Cnwc, Caerfarchell, cist cemetery
PRN: 2639	St Davids, St Justinians's Chapel and cemetery ?
PRN: 2638	St Davids, St Patrick's Chapel and cemetery ?
PRN: 2695	St David's, Tremynydd cist cemetery
PRN: 2640	St David's, Ty Gwyn, monastery site?
PRN: 2701	St Davids, Waun-y-beddau cist cemetery ?
PRN: 2712	St Davids (Ramsey Island), St Tyfanog's Chapel ?
PRN: 1058	St Dogmaels, Penrhyn Castle cemetery
PRN: 1054	St Dogmaels, Caerau cist cemetery
PRN: 9814	St Ishmaels, Great Castle Head ?church and cemetery ?
PRN: 2513	St Nicholas, Llandrudion, Weirglodd-y-fynwent cist cemetery
PRN: 3030	Steynton, St Budoc's Chapel and cemetery?
PRN: 3016	Walwyn's Castle, Capeston round barrow re-use

**A BURIAL FROM THE CIST CEMETERY AT CROESGOCH,
PEMBROKESHIRE**

REPORT NUMBER 200356

APRIL 2003

This report has been prepared by Neil Ludlow

Position Project Manager

Signature

Date

12/05/2003

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

Position Director

Signature

Date

12/05/03

PP Gwilym Hughes

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on the content or presentation of this report