BROWNSLADE BARROW CASTLEMARTIN PEMBROKESHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Phase 2: August 2006 - Site Narrative



Paratowyd gan: Archaeoleg Cambria Ar gyfer: Defence Estates

Prepared by: Cambria Archaeology

For: Defence Estates





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BROWNSLADE BARROW CASTLEMARTIN, PEMBROKESHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCATION PHASE 2: August 2006

Site Narrative

Gan / By

Pete Crane BA Hons MIFA Gwilym Hughes BA FSA MIFA

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Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121 Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131

Ffacs: 01558 823133 Ebost: cambria@cambria.org.uk Gwefan: www.cambria.org.uk CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo,
Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: cambria@cambria.org.uk Website:

ail: cambria@cambria.org.uk We www.cambria.org.uk

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
PROJECT OBJECTIVES	2
FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY	2
SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS	3
PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS	5
REFERENCES	6
FIGURES	7
PHOTOGRAPHS	11
APPENDIX 1. Contexts with finds table	

Front cover: excavating a human burial underlying the later boundary wall in the eastern area of the site

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This brief statement provides a preliminary summary of the results of an archaeological excavation at Brownslade Barrow, Castlemartin Range, Pembrokeshire (Fig. 1, NGR SR 9052 9722). The work was undertaken by Cambria Archaeology on behalf of Defence Estates during August 2006. It follows a brief for the project prepared by Defence Estates and a detailed project design prepared by Cambria Archaeology (2006).

Brownslade Barrow is one of a number of archaeological features on the Castelemartin Estate that are thought to be of Bronze Age date. It is a scheduled ancient monument (PE 315) and it is presumed to have been a burial mound dating to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. However, antiquarian investigation during the late 19th century identified a central burial that has been subsequently suggested to date to the Romano-British or early medieval period. Further extended, inhumation burials were identified in and around the barrow and some of these were in stone lined cists. These suggested that the barrow mound had become a focus for an early medieval, Christian cemetery.

Considerable badger disturbance to the environs of the barrow was observed during a site visit in 2001. This disturbance had brought a significant number of human bones to the surface and concern was raised about the potential damage that was being caused to a significant archaeological site. In order to assist with the formulation of future management options, an archaeological topographic and geophysical survey was commissioned in 2002 (Ludlow 2002) and a small-scale archaeological evaluation in 2003 (Ludlow 2003). As part of the evaluation, an examination was undertaken of the collection of human remains that had been recovered from the site. A total of 104 bone fragments representing at least six individuals were examined (Coard 2003). Three radiocarbon dates obtained for this bone material indicates a date range of between AD 450 and AD 960 which supports the early medieval date that had previously been suggested for the cemetery.

The results of the survey and evaluation demonstrated the archaeological potential and significance of Brownslade Barrow. However, it became clear that the site faced a significant threat from ongoing badger activity. A decision was taken by Defence Estates, in consultation with the National Park Archaeologist, the Heritage Management Section of Cambria Archaeology CCW and Cadw, to relocate the badger sett, erect badger-proof fencing around the undisturbed areas and to undertake the full excavation of those areas that have been most severely affected by the badger action.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The excavation had important management and research objectives.

Management objectives

Site protection - The relocation of the badger sett, and the erection of badger-proof fencing will help to protect the Scheduled Area of the site. Prior to the excavation, the Scheduled Area did not appear to be disturbed by badgers. However, if left unmanaged, the sett would have spread into the protected area and, ultimately, would have destroyed the site. The relocation of the badger sett gave rise to the need for excavation – once vacated, a sett must be destroyed in order to prevent re-colonisation. In most instances, the sett would be destroyed mechanically. In this case, due to the nationally important archaeological

remains, the only appropriate method of sett destruction was by archaeological excavation.

Damage assessment - The excavation would provide an opportunity to undertake a damage assessment of the effect of badger activity on archaeological remains. This assessment could be used in the future management of both Brownslade Barrow and other archaeological sites that are similarly affected by badgers and other burrowing animals. The impact of the badgers could be usefully compared with data collected from other sites including Barrow Clump on Salisbury Plain. The information would assist decisions regarding the exclusion of burrowing animals or other management options.

Research objectives

Funerary and burial practice - Brownslade Barrow appears to be a multi-period burial site, used for a period of perhaps three millennia. As such it provided a rare opportunity to examine changes in funerary and ritual practice over time. In particular, the excavation provided a rare opportunity to examine in detail an early medieval cemetery site. It forms one of a group of 33 known or possible cist grave cemetery sites in Pembrokeshire for this period. However, only a small number have been examined in any detail. The need for good quality excavated evidence from these sites has been identified as one of the stated research priorities for the early medieval period in southwest Wales '... the excavation of some substantial cemeteries with preserved skeletal remains...further dating of undeveloped cemeteries... would be desirable.' (www.cpat.org.uk).

Human remains analysis - The good preservation of the human bone from the site provided a rare opportunity for retrieving information about population structure, diet and disease during the early medieval period in Pembrokeshire.

Paleaoenvironmental analysis – a detailed programme of palaeoenvironmental analysis was to be undertaken. Particular attention was paid to any preserved buried soil horizons that may enable an assessment of both prehistoric and early historic environmental conditions.

FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

Trench location and dimensions (Fig. 2)

The location of excavation trenches was previously agreed between DE and the National Park Archaeologist and slightly amended during the course of the fieldwork. Trenches 1 and 2 were located to the north of the barrow and were the focus of Phase 1 of the archaeological work undertaken in May 2006. The detailed results are reported upon elsewhere (Crane and Hughes 2006).

Phase 2 involved the excavation of an area $30m \times 20m$ (Trench 3) to the southeast of the barrow focusing on the area of the badger sett and the previously observed human remains that had been brought to the surface by badger activity.

Method of excavation and on-site recording

The area of the trench was initially dived into six areas (numbered Areas 5-10 on Fig 2) divided by 2m wide baulks. Two hand excavated transects, each 2m wide, were initially excavated in the southeastern area to test the depth of the badger

disturbed topsoil and the character of the underlying stratigraphy. Once this had been established, the remaining badger disturbed topsoil was excavated from all six areas using a JCB mechanical excavator. The surface of the underlying sandy deposits were cleaned using hand tools to define archaeological cuts and features including graves. No graves were encountered cutting the sand in Area 6 and so the opportunity was taken, towards the end of the excavation, to mechanically excavate an area approximately of 6m x 6m to investigate the pre-sand soil formations.

SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The early deposits and sand formation

The lowermost deposit encountered (at a depth of 1.25m in Area 6 and at 1.2m in the southeast corner of Area 5) was a yellow-brown silty clay that was interpreted as a pre-sand loess soil. This was cut by two linear features and a small posthole. No artefacts were recovered from these features apart from small fragments of animal bone and teeth. The loess and the cut features were overlain by brown sandy silt, approximately 0.2m thick that has been interpreted as a buried soil. Narrow criss-crossing cultivation marks, possibly created by an ard, were observed cutting both the surface of the 'buried' soil and the underlying loess (Photo 1). Bulk palaeo-environmental samples have been collected from the various early deposits and fills to recover possible charred plant remains and samples for radiocarbon dating. Soil micro-morphology samples have been collected from the interface between the respective layers.

The buried soil was overlain by a thin layer of yellow brown sand, approximately 0.2m thick and associated with a poorly built, low drystone wall running southwest-northeast across the site (Photo 2). This wall was recorded in the southeastern part of Area 5 and the northeastern part of Area 9 and, again, this structure was not associated with any dating evidence. The wall was overlain by a thick deposit of yellow sand up to 0.7m thick. This build up of sand varied in character between the eastern and western parts of the site. In the western area (Areas 5,6 and 8) it was more yellow in colour and coarser in composition and resembled the build-up of a sand dune. In the eastern areas (Area 7 and 10) it was siltier and yellow-brown in colour. The upper part of the sand in all areas of the site was heavily disturbed by badger activity including runs and chambers. However, in the western areas these runs and chambers were largely backfilled with sandy soil whereas in the eastern areas they were still voiding (Photo 3). It was clear from this that the badgers had been most recently active in the eastern areas of the site.

The sand deposits contained a well-preserved assemblage of land molluscs. Samples were collected from two columns through the sand and underlying deposits in Areas 5 and 6 (Photo 4). It is hope that these assemblages will assist in the overall interpretation of the changing landscape conditions across the site. It is also hoped that sufficient burnt material exists to obtain a chronology for the establishment and subsequent development of this sand deposit.

The early medieval cemetery

The top of the sand was cut by a series of graves the majority of which contained the fragmentary remains of orientated, extended inhumation burials. The majority had been badly disturbed by badger activity with only fragments of the articulated skeletons surviving. In some cases the badger activity had completely

removed the upper and/or lower parts of the skeletons (Photo 5). Several of the burials were associated with stone cists and these had generally fared rather better than the 'open' graves (Photo 6). However, even some of the stone cist burials had been undermined by badger runs and had subsequently partially collapsed (Photo 7).

Despite the badger disturbance, the remains of approximately 30 distinct burials were identified and excavated. The general condition of the bones was excellent with good preservation of all parts of the skeleton (Photo 8). The southeastern and southwestern limits of the cemetery appear to have been identified although no fence-line, bank, wall or other form of boundary demarcates the edge of the burial ground in these areas. The burials clearly continued beyond the edges of the excavation to the north and northwest in the direction of the barrow. It seems likely that the cemetery continues right up to the edge of the barrow and even onto the southeastern side of the monument.

There does not appear to be any formal organisation of the burials within the cemetery although there is a suggestion that some may be arranged in rough rows. There was an initial suggestion that the burials fell into two distinct clusters, one in the northern part of Area 5 and Area 8 and the second in the eastern part of Area 8 and the northern part of Area 10. However, this will need to be clarified during the post-excavation analysis. In addition to the remains of the articulated skeletons a substantial quantity of disarticulated human skeletal material was also recovered from the overlying badger disturbed topsoil.

There was little clear evidence for intercutting burials, despite the original description by Laws that the burials that he recorded in the late nineteenth century were, `.... stacked like pigeons in a pie...' (Laws 1888). However, there was a suggestion that a number of infant burials in the western area of the excavation were later than the adult burials in this part of the cemetery. No further dating information was obtained. Consequently, there is not yet any demonstrable evidence that any of the burials date to the period after the Anglo-Norman conquest of this area of Pembrokeshire. However, this possibility cannot be ruled out and it may be clarified when further radiocarbon dates are obtained.

At least one of the burials was overlain by a grave marker and an associated stone spread, overlying the burials, contained fragments from at least three rotary querns. No other objects were recovered in immediate association with any of the burials. In addition to the human remains there were a number of animal burials including a pig. However, the date of these burials was uncertain and they may be later than the early medieval cemetery.

Later features

The most northeasterly of the burials (in the northeastern corner of Area 10) was overlain by a field boundary wall (Photo 9). This drystone structure survived to a height of 0.5m and was 0.5m wide. Its eastern side was orientated north-south and lay just inside the eastern edge of the excavation (Photo 10). In Area 7 it returned at an acute angle and extended into the central area of the excavation, becoming progressively more dilapidated (Photo 11). In the central eastern area of the site, the wall had been severely undermined by the ongoing badger activity and was little more than a pile of rubble. It appeared to peter-out all together in the northwestern part of Area 7 and there was little evidence of it in the western part of Area 9.

It is suggested that the wall forms part of a medieval or post-medieval boundary system post-dating the cemetery. It appears to link-up with a series of low earth and rubble banks visible in the area around the barrow (Fig. 2). A section through part of one of these banks was examined in May 2006 (Crane and Hughes 2006, 3; Trench 2) where it appeared to be designed to prevent the encroachment of sand into an area of apparent medieval activity.

Further evidence for medieval activity in the vicinity of the excavation came from numerous fragments of green-glazed medieval pottery and animal bone recovered from the badger-disturbed topsoil and a stone spread overlying the burials. The quality of the pottery and a fragment of glazed ridge tile suggest the presence of a high-status building in the vicinity. However, there was no clear evidence for any buildings, structures or associated features within the area of the excavation itself, apart from a single pit containing a substantial deposit of limpet shells. Therefore, it seems that the focus for this medieval activity lay outside of the immediate excavation area. Fragments of iron slag from the topsoil also suggest small-scale industrial activity in the area. It is uncertain whether this material is early medieval or later in date. However, a stratified fragment was recovered from an early feature in Trench 2 during Phase 1 of the excavation in May.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Significant progress has been made towards addressing all the principal objectives of the project.

Management objectives

The excavation has provided significant information about the nature of the badger activity and the extent of the disturbance caused to the archaeological features and deposits. Although there was evidence for former badger activity across the whole of the site, it appears that they had been progressively moving from the eastern areas to the western areas. They do not appear to have been recently active in the western areas, although this area still contained a complex of backfilled former runs and chambers (Photo 12). By contrast the eastern areas resembled a 'Swiss cheese' with active runs and chambers forming large voids in the excavation area. In both areas the extent of the damage was greater than expected, with intercutting runs as earlier badger runs were abandoned and later ones created.

Inevitably, this activity has caused severe damage to the graves of the early medieval cemetery and later features and structures. However, it seems that the badger activity has only penetrated to a depth of approximately 1m. This has left the lower, sub-sand' deposits relatively undisturbed. Only in the southeastern corner of the site did it appear that the badger runs has cut into the top of the buried soil and underlying loess deposits. It is assumed that these early deposits remain relatively intact elsewhere across the excavation.

When the post-excavation analysis is complete, the project will make a valuable contribution to wider management issues relating to badgers and burrowing mammals in general and the protection of earthwork archaeological sites.

Research Objectives

Despite the damage caused by the badger activity, a significant amount of information was recovered relating to the layout and composition of the early

medieval cemetery. The excellent bone preservation in particular should allow the opportunity for the retrieval of information about population structure, diet and disease during the early medieval period in Pembrokeshire.

It is hoped that the samples recovered from the excavation will also make a significant contribution to an understanding of the changing palaeo-environment. The well-preserved mollusc remains may be particularly helpful in this exercise.

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Figure 1. Location map, based on the Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

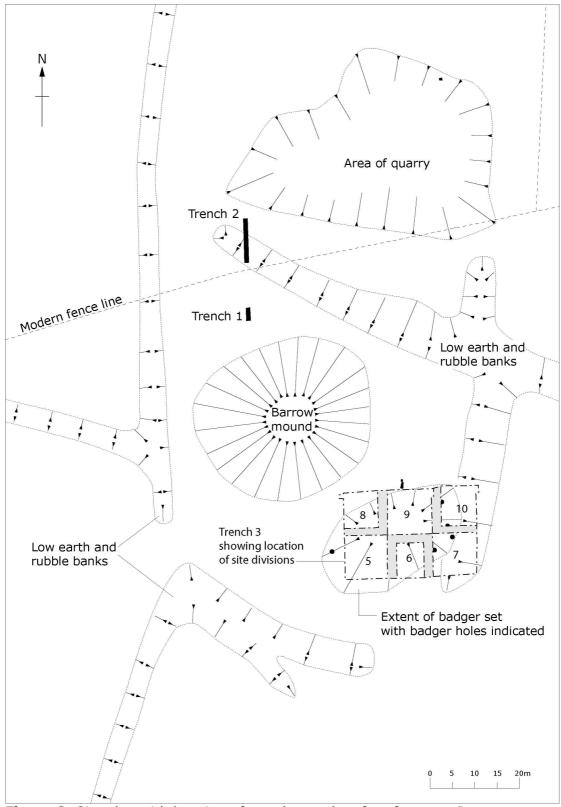


Figure 2: Site plan with location of trenches and surface features. Dots are badger holes.

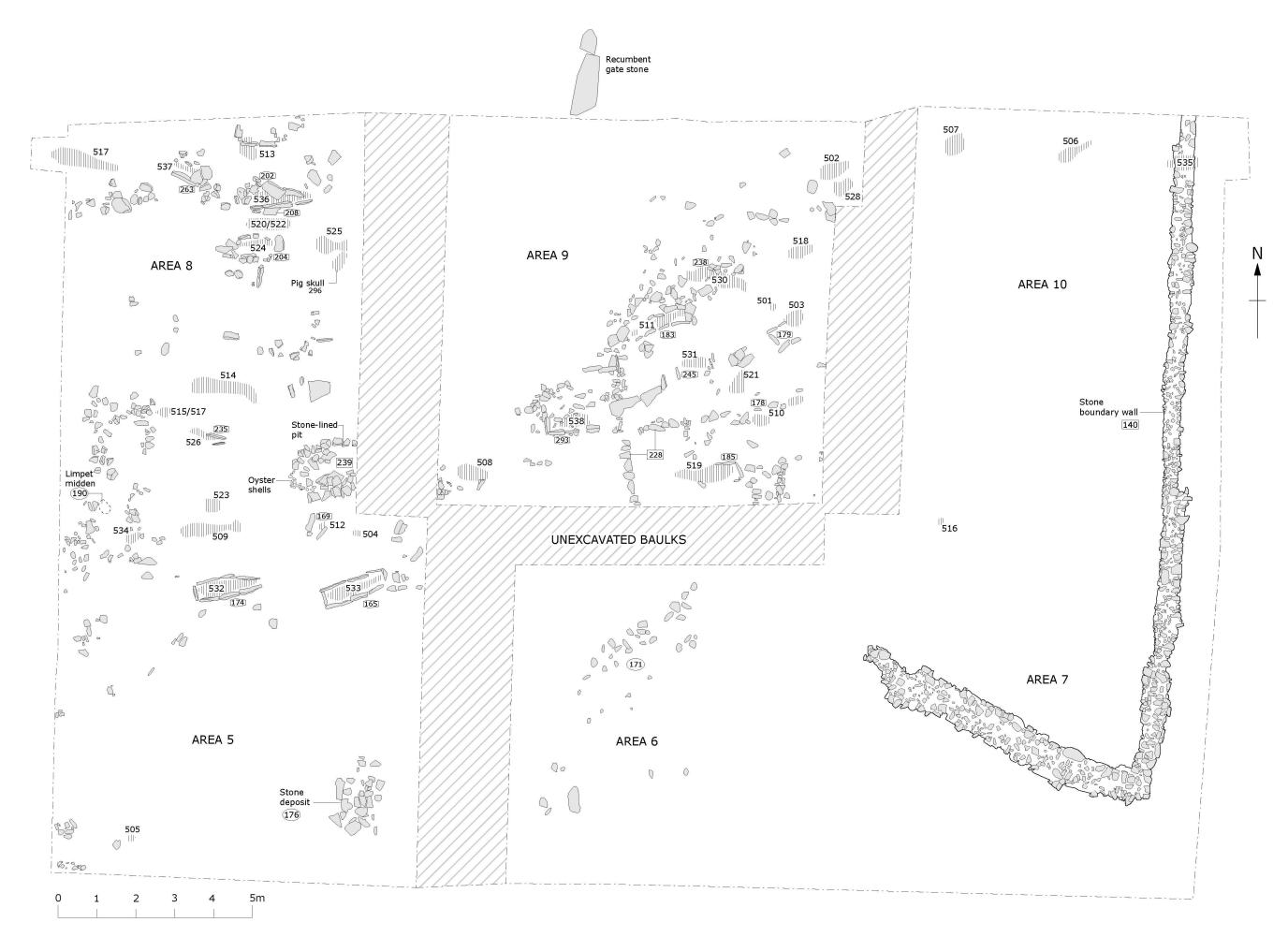


Figure 3. Excavation area, features on or cut into sand

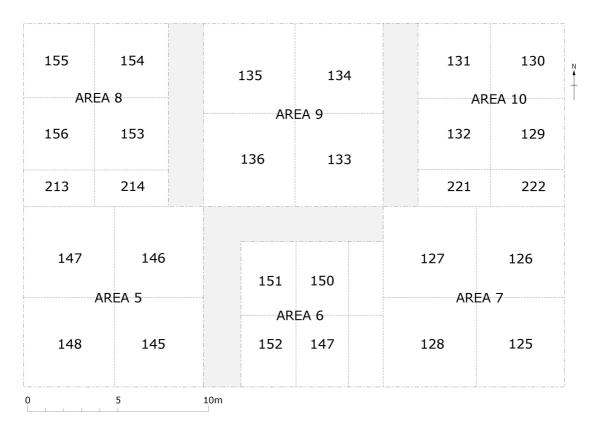


Figure 4. Excavation area, showing context numbers topsoil in various areas of the site



Photo 1 – the cultivation marks in the 'buried soil' in Area 6



Photo 2 – the early drystone wall in Area 9



Photo 3 – the recent active badger chambers and runs 'voiding' in the sand in the eastern area of the site



Photo 4 – Collecting soil micro-morphology samples and mollusc samples from the stratigraphic sequence in Area $\,6\,$



Photo 5 – the fragmentary remains of an in-situ burial after being virtually destroyed by badger activity



Photo 6 – a well-preserved burial in a stone cist in the western area of the site



Photo 7 – A collapsed burial in a stone cist that has been undermined by a badger run



Photo 8 – A burial in Area 5 showing the excellent bone preservation (although parts of the skeleton have been removed by badger activity)



Photo 9 – excavating a burial overlain by the field boundary wall close to the eastern edge of the excavation $\,$



Photo 10 – the drystone field boundary wall close to the eastern edge of the excavation



Photo 11 – the drystone wall in Areas 7 and 10



Photo 12 – a section in the western part of the site (Area 5) showing backfilled former badger runs and chambers

Appendix 1. Contexts with finds table

Context	Sub	Bone	Pot	Clay pipe	Flint	Shell	Stone (obj No)	Sample	Slag	Iron	Other	Context type and description
102	1	\checkmark	$\sqrt{}$						\checkmark			Topsoil
103	1	\checkmark	\checkmark									Deposit/layer below 102
104	1	\checkmark										Sandy deposit above buried soil
105	1								\checkmark			Fill of Gully 104
107						\checkmark						Buried soil
111	2	\checkmark										Topsoil and turf
112	2	\checkmark									Mortar	Layer below topsoil
114	2	\checkmark							√	\checkmark		Deposit below 112 and above fills of
												features
121												Retaining wall
125	7	\checkmark										SE quarter area 7. Topsoil plus
126	7	\checkmark		√	√				√	√	Bullets, metal, slate	NE quarter area 7. Topsoil plus
127	7	\checkmark				\checkmark					Metal	NW quarter area 7. Topsoil plus
128	7	\checkmark		√							Metal	SW quarter area 7. Topsoil plus
129	10	\checkmark				√					Mortar, shrapnel?	SE quarter area 10. Topsoil plus
											coal	
130	10	\checkmark									Metal, bullets, lime	NE quarter area 10. Topsoil plus
131	10	\checkmark	√			√			\checkmark		Coal, heat affected stone	NW quarter area 10. Topsoil plus
132	10	√	√			√					Slate, lime, metal, quartz	SW quarter area 10. Topsoil plus
133	9	\checkmark	√		√	√			√		Slate, lime, bullet	SE quarter area 9. Topsoil plus
134	9	√	√		√	√	Pebble, 606 quern		√		Metal	NE quarter area 9. Topsoil plus
135	9	√				√	pebbles				Metal	NW quarter area 9. Topsoil plus
136	9	V							√			SW quarter area 9. Topsoil plus
137	4-10	V	√									Unstratified, from spoil tip etc
141	7&10	√	V				603 quern				Tile?	Rubble spread from wall 140
142	7	√	V				,				Copper?	Layer below rubble spread 141 on inside of wall 140
143	7	√	√		√				√		Metal	Stony rubble under 139 in SE? quarter
145	5	√	V						√			SE quarter of area 5. Topsoil plus

146	5	√				\checkmark	quern?	√		NE quarter of area 5. Topsoil plus
147	5	√ 601	√	√		√	Quartz, pebble		Metal	NW quarter of area 5. Topsoil plus
148	5	√				√	Pebble, 602 quern	√	Bullets, nails	SW quarter of area 5. Topsoil plus
149	6	√					Quartz			SE quarter of area 6, Topsoil plus
150	6	\checkmark				$\sqrt{}$	Quartz	√		NE quarter of area 6, Topsoil plus
151	6	\checkmark				\checkmark		$\sqrt{}$		NW quarter of area 6, Topsoil plus
152	6	\checkmark						√		SW quarter of area 6, Topsoil plus
153	8	\checkmark	\checkmark				$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$		SE quarter of area 8, Topsoil plus
154	8	\checkmark						$\sqrt{}$	Metal	NE quarter of area 8, Topsoil plus
155	8		\checkmark		\checkmark		$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	Metal, lime	NW quarter of area 8, Topsoil plus
156	8	\checkmark	√		√	√	Grave marker	√	Shrapnel, horseshoe, lime	SW quarter of area 8, Topsoil plus
157	9	√								Disarticulated human bone from near skeleton 502
158	9	√								Disarticulated human bone from near skeleton 503
170	10	√	√							Rubble from wall 169
171	6	√	√						Metal	Stone and soil layer above yellow sand 223
173	7	√			√	√			Lime	Layer below rubble 141 on interior of wall 143. Possibly same as 142)
176	5	√	√		V			√	Metal	Stone and foil feature in SE corner of area 5. Above stone 176
177	5	√								Stone deposit in NE corner of area 5
181	10		√							Fill of disturbed grave associated with skeleton fragments 507
182	10		√							Fill of grave associated with skeleton fragment 506
184	9	√								Fill of stone cist 183, associated with grave 511
187	10		√							Layer of silty sand into which graves are cut (Possible contamination PC)
190	5								Iron hook 605	Upper fill of pit with masses of limpet shell. Suspect post med
194	5	√								Wind blown sand

210	8	√						Fill of cist 209
212	5					√		Fill of cist 169 (skeleton 512)
213	8	$\sqrt{}$	√	√		√	Bullet	West end of central bulk area 8. Topsoil
								plus
214	8	$\sqrt{}$	√	√				East end of central bulk area 8. Topsoil
								plus
219	8	\checkmark						Fill of probable posthole 220, possibly root
								disturbed
221	10	\checkmark	√	√				West end of central bulk area 10. Topsoil
								plus
222	10	\checkmark	√				Mortar, military	East end of central bulk area 10. Topsoil
							ordnance, lime,	plus
		,	 				coal metal	
223	6	\checkmark	√	√				Almost pure yellow sand below quarter 150
20.4		,						and deposit 171
224	8							Yellow sand below graves, cists and
220	-	,						postholes Yellow brown silt below wall rubble 141 in
229	7	\checkmark						quarter of area 7
230	8	√	+					Badger skeleton, probably in south baulk
233	8	V	√	 		√		Fill of empty cist, NOTE see if bones join
233	0	V	\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	V		V		with adjacent bone deposit 513
238	9				607 Grave			Stones above grave 238 containing
230)				marker			skeleton 530
239	8	√			marker			Grave surround?
243	9		√ /			√ /		Fill of grave cist 238 containing skeleton
2 13		•	•			•		530
244	9	√						Fill of cist ***
246	9	V	√					Fill of cist 245
248	9	V	V		Pebbles	√	Iron	Deposit. Unable to tell if disturbed graves
								or badger disturbance
249	9	$\sqrt{}$	√				605 Iron ring	Deposit over cists
250	10	√	√					Finds from NE quadrant of area 10 below
								130
256	9					√		Deposit possibly Laws backfill?
257	8				Stone			Deposit. Possibly in undefined pit? Possibly

								Laws disturbance? (PC)
264	9							Deposit with partial animal skeleton.
								Sheep?
266	5	\checkmark		\checkmark	Stone	√	Charcoal	Larger fill of pit? 269? Possible badger
								disturbance
267	8						Mortar	Fill of grave 268. Contains skeleton 517
270	8	\checkmark						Disturbed fill around cist 240
273	6	\checkmark					Charcoal	Gully possibly for timbers. Pre dates sand
291	9							Spit in SW quadrant of area 9 below 136.
								Cleared to find burials below
295	?	\checkmark						Context record sheets only go up to 294!
								Need to check label and other records to
								see if this context turns up. 195?

Note: Each of the areas were dug initially in spits and with each area divided into 4 quarters for the recovery of finds. This was primarily done so disturbed human bones could possibly later be related to burials below (See Fig 4)

BROWNSLADE BARROW CASTLEMARTIN, PEMBROKESHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCATION PHASE 2: August 2006

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Pete Crane and Gwilym Hughes Swydd / Position: Senior Archaeologist and Director
Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date
Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith This report has been checked and approved by
ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf. on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.
Ken Murphy Swydd / Position: Principal Archaeologist
Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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