THE PEMBROKESHIRE CEMETERIES PROJECT

EXCAVATIONS AT

ST BRIDES HAVEN, PEMBROKESHIRE
2009

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Gan / By

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SUMMARY

Over two weeks in March 2009, The Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) undertook a small excavation at St Brides Haven, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 8021 1094) on behalf of Cadw and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (PCNP) Authority.

For several hundred years visitors to the beach at St Brides Haven have noticed stone lined 'cist' graves eroding from the low coastal Old Red Sandstone cliffs to the north of St Brides parish church.

The style of burials, place name evidence, antiquarian references to a chapel, and the discovery of an early Christian carved stone monument, all suggest the site was an early medieval cemetery and ecclesiastical site. In 1985 a radiocarbon sample from a cist burial exposed in the cliff face provided an early medieval date. A second burial, however, provided a date post-medieval date.

In recent years, the process of erosion has been periodically monitored and recorded by DAT. The work undertaken in 2009 aimed to obtain more information about the extent and character of the site, to enable an effective strategy for the future management of the site and the archaeological resource, to be formulated.

Evidence of industrial activity, and a probable associated building were identified. Five human burials identified within the excavated area were left in-situ. A stone bank and a rock cut ditch are two candidates for a boundary to the cemetery.

Although evidence for several phases of activity was revealed during the excavation, good dating evidence was scarce, and full understanding of the sequence of occupation at the site awaits both the results of specialist analysis, radiocarbon dating and hopefully further excavation. These results will provide useful information for designing a management strategy for the site, and will also provide important information for comparison with other sites investigated as part of the Pembrokeshire Early Medieval Cemeteries Project.

The excavation was undertaken by staff from DAT and volunteers from the local community.

The project was funded by Cadw grant aid and PCNPA.

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INTRODUCTION

Project background

The site lies at NGR SM 8021 1094 within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, close to the popular beach of St Brides Haven (Figures 1 – 3; Photo 1). It is one of approximately 38 known or possible early medieval cemetery sites in Pembrokeshire.

In 2009, Dyfed Archaeological Trust was grant aided by Cadw and PCNPA to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site to clarify its nature, extent and survival.

Project objectives

The main goal of the project was to obtain information on the extent, complexity and significance of the archaeological resource that might require consideration within a management plan for the site.

In addition to the archaeological objectives, community engagement and involvement was an important aspect of the project. Local volunteers undertook the majority of excavation, providing a rare opportunity to gain archaeological experience.

The popular and easily accessible location of St Brides resulted in a steady stream of visitors to the excavation, for whom explanations of the reasons for the excavation and the discoveries made were provided.

Methodology

Standard archive sources for aerial photographic coverage, and documentary evidence held at the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) were consulted prior to commencement of the fieldwork. Throughout this report 'PRN' stands for Primary Record Number. This refers to the unique numbering system used to identify archaeological sites and projects about which information is held within the HER.

Geophysical survey

Part of the site was cleared of gorse and brambles before a geophysical (magnetometer) survey of the target area could be undertaken. The survey was intended to ascertain the possible extent and complexity of the site, and to inform the location and extent of trial trenching (Figures 4 – 6). The results of the survey were inconclusive, and did not suggest any clear features to target with trial trenches. In retrospect however, features revealed by excavation in trenches 1 and 4, were found to coincide with vague features on the geophysics survey (see below).

Excavation

Although constrained by the location, four trenches were opened using a 'mini-digger' to investigate potentially significant features visible as earthworks, and to try to ascertain the extent of the cemetery.

All archaeological features were hand-excavated, and recorded using the standard system employed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Plans and section drawings were drawn at 1:20 scale and excavated features photographed in digital format. The majority of the excavation was undertaken by local volunteers under the supervision of DAT staff. All trenches were backfilled at the end of the excavation.

Excavation of human skeletal material was avoided. One bulk soil sample was taken for the recovery of charred plant remains and to obtain an AMS date.

Historical and archaeological background (Figure 3)

St Brides church (PRN 3131; Photos 2 and 4) is dedicated to Saint Bridget (aka St Fraed, St Bridig), who is thought to have come to Pembrokeshire with St David *c*.550-600AD and possibly to have established a nunnery at St Brides. The Brigid dedication has long been associated with the survival and translation of a pre-Christian water cult (Ludlow 1995). St Brides was possibly mentioned in an early 13th century source, as rendering a pension to Ewenny Priory, Glamorgan (Conway Davies 1946, 336). There are no known earlier documentary references. The fabric of the church is probably 14th century at the earliest, but an 'Ecclesia de Sancta Brigida' was listed in the Taxatio of 1291 (Record Commission 1802). The church underwent a 'very full' restoration in 1868 (Anon. nd.) but still contains several objects and features that point to its antiquity (Ludlow 2000).

A Group I inscribed stone (PRN 46854), of probable 5th-7th century date (Edwards 2008) is recorded by or on behalf of Edward Lhuyd (in about 1698) as having been found 'On ye sea shore near St Brides Pembrokeshire'. The record includes a sketch of the stone which appears to be a flat slab with vertical downwards lettering that appears to read 'Awaaos' or 'Avvaos'. The letters have no known meaning, but may be incomplete (Edwards 2008). The stone is now lost.

The churchyard (PRN 27990) is represented as a roughly rectangular enclosure on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. By the 2nd edition, the churchyard had been enlarged to its present size. The earlier churchyard boundary is still visible as an earthwork within the churchyard (Photo 2). The churchyard appears to partly overlie the east half of a curving cropmark (PRN 13294) visible on aerial photographs (Plate 1). The cropmark shows a semicircle with a north-south diameter of *c*.70m, and may originally have formed a complete circle. The cropmark may represent an early medieval enclosure. The existing St Brides Church would appear to lie outside, or perhaps on the very periphery of, the enclosure, and may therefore post-date it. The topography in the location of the cropmark, however, is not particularly suggestive of a likely location for an early medieval ecclesiastical enclosure.

The cist cemetery (PRN 7606) lies 50m to the north of the churchyard and would also appear to lie beyond the projected circumference of the circular enclosure. The cemetery is traditionally associated with a medieval chapelry (PRN 3138) also recorded by Edward Lhuyd in *c*.1698 (BL Stowe MS 1023, fo 23). The remains of the chapel were still visible in 1833 when Lewis recorded that:

'…. *at the neck of a small inlet from the bay, which flows up almost to the churchyard, forming what is now called St Brides Haven. A considerable herring fishery, which has been discontinued for many years, was formerly carried on here with very great advantage, and there are still remnants of an ancient chapel on the beach, which according to tradition, was subsequently appropriated as a salting-house for curing the fish. In the cemetery belonging to this chapel were numerous stone coffins, of which several have been washed away by the encroachment of the sea, which has here gained considerably on the shore, as was proved some years ago, during an extraordinary recess of the tide, by the discovery of several stumps of trees.*' (Lewis 1833)

However, Fenton records that the chapel appears to have been lost to coastal erosion by the 19th century:

'*In the little creek which almost comes up to the churchyard wall there was in former days a great fishery of herrings; and close on the shore a little raised above the beach stood a small chapel, where the fishermen were used to put up their prayers for their success and averting the dangers of the sea, and round which they were buried, as to this day many stone coffins are seen peeping out of the crumbling earth, eaten away by the sea at high tides*.'. (Fenton 1903 edn).

Fenton also records that:

'*There is a tradition that out of the ruins of the chapel a salt-house for the convenience and use of the fishery was erected, and from that time the fishery failed, which occasioned the following distich:*

> *'When St Brides chapel a salt-house was made,*
> *St Brides lost the herring trade'. (Fenton 1903).*

In addition to the chapel and cemetery therefore, it seems likely that there would have been various buildings and structures associated with the fishing industry at St Brides Haven.

The limekiln (PRN 23815) is a 'three-quarter circular' type with two rounded drawing arches, and demonstrates another industry that was practiced at St Brides and which is likely to have left an archaeological legacy apart from the restored lime-kiln itself.

Being stone-built, the chapel is most likely to have been of late medieval date, but its association with the early medieval cemetery suggests it may have had earlier origins. Either the parish church, or the chapel, may have originated as a *capel-y-bedd*, i.e. a late medieval chapel over an early medieval founder's grave (Ludlow 2005).

Local tradition holds that the westernmost part of Cliff Cottage (to the north of the cemetery) was formerly a 'fisherman's chapel'. The building does indeed seem to be of some antiquity, and has an interesting blocked arched doorway on the seaward side (Photo 3). Having been blessed, this doorway is thought to have been a means of exiting the chapel without having to retrace one's steps, before embarking on a sea voyage.

It is possible therefore; that St Brides may have been a multiple church site, and that the status of 'primary church' may have switched from one site to the other during the pre- or post-Conquest periods. In 1985 two radiocarbon samples obtained from burials eroding from the cliff cemetery were processed at the department of Plant Sciences, University College Cardiff. Sample CAR917, from a cist burial produced a date of 1000 +/- 70 b.p (810-1090 AD at 2 sigma cal.) Sample (CAR 931) from a simple dug burial, provided a date of 150 +/- 60 b.p. (*c*.1650 AD at 2 sigma cal.) was obtained. This may suggest that burial rights continued in the chapel cemetery after the later church was built, or that a tradition of sanctity was maintained there (Ludlow 2002).

Further inland are the remains of a manor house known as 'The Abbey' (PRN 3139). The bulk of the buildings are of post-medieval date, but at its core is a tower house of possible 15th century date. At St Brides Green are the remains of ornamental fishponds (PRN 27983).

The known history and archaeology of St Brides therefore suggests that in the past there was likely to have been much more settlement, commerce, industrial and religious activity in the area than is apparent or imaginable at St Brides Haven today.

In addition to occasional monitoring (Crane 2006; Crane 2003; Murphy 1997) and recording of the eroding burials (Ludlow 2005), two 'watching briefs' on groundworks undertaken in the vicinity have been carried out (Ludlow 1995 and Crane 2004). In both instances, no significant archaeological features were revealed.

Site description

St Brides Haven is a small, sheltered north-facing inlet on St. Bride's Bay (Figure 2 and 3; Plate 1; Photo 1). To the south of the inlet is a low-lying flat valley with two streams flowing into the inlet. The easternmost stream was dammed to form a series of at least two fishponds (PRN 27983), possibly when the manor house (PRN 3139) was established.

The excavation area is located immediately south of the low cliffs at the back of the beach, to the east of the restored lime-kiln, and to the north of the present church (Figure 3; Photo 1). The eastern limit of the area is defined by a stone wall built around the edge of a former pond. The site location is dissected by several footpaths leading to the beach and there are various 'humps, bumps and depressions' presumed to indicate the presence of sub-surface archaeological features. Much of the site was formerly covered with gorse and brambles, but these were cleared to enable the geophysical survey and excavations to proceed. Two mature, 'wind-pruned' Ash trees are located between the cliff edge and the car park area.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

The locations of all cut trenches are represented in Figure 4. Trenches were located so as to keep footpaths clear, to sample visible earthworks, and to avoid damaging the roots and branches of old trees.

Trench 1 (Figures 9 and 10)

Trench 1 was L-shaped with a southwest-northeast axis (Trench 1a) and a roughly southeast-northwest axis (Trench 1b). Machine excavation started at the northeast end of Trench 1a, where a cist grave was encountered. The trench was extended to the southwest in order to ascertain the extent of burials and to cross a visible earthwork bank at a right angle. Trench 1b was extended southeastward in order to ascertain whether burials continued eastward.

Deposits of topsoil and of underlying, essentially unstructured, loose humic soil, mixed with frequent stone rubble, were removed by machine to reveal either features cut into the natural geology, or overlying deposits thought to warrant more careful excavation.

Slate and mortar spread 003
A spread of flat-lying fragmented roof slates and mortar fragments extended over approximately half the length of Trenches 1a and b (Photos 16 and 17). This is considered to be the remains of a collapsed slate roof. The mortar may derive from mortar pointing between the slates - a building tradition in the west Pembrokeshire area.

Within Trench 1b the slate layer appeared to lie almost directly upon the natural geology, perhaps suggesting that the area within and around the collapsed building, and in the vicinity of the lime-kiln, had been stripped down to the top of the natural geology to provide a hard surface for construction.

Within Trench 1a, the slate spread is higher up in the sequence of deposits, suggesting that to the east of bank 004 the area was not stripped down to the natural geology. This non-stripped area also contained the burials.

Stone rubble spread 002
This feature overlies the slate spread and was at first thought to be a stone rubble bank (Photo 16). On excavation, however, some of the stones appeared to be pitched. The stones are now thought to be part of a collapsed wall of a building and are presumably associated with the remains of the collapsed slate roof.

Pit cut 018
This pit was located at the apex of Trenches 1 and 2, and appeared to be earlier than slate layer 003 (Photo 20). The feature appears to coincide with a high magnetometer signal, suggesting burning. The fill of the pit did indeed contain evidence of burning.

Linear feature 023
This shallow linear feature is thought to be the truncated remains of a ditch terminal truncated by the base of cut 018 (Photo 21). It may be the eastward continuation of ditch 017 in Trench 4.

Stone bank/wall 004
Bank 004 was visible as a slightly curved short length of earthwork its former extent apparently obscured or truncated by later features (Photos 18 and 20). On excavation it was found to be a remnant stone rubble bank. The removal of displaced stones revealed the last few stones of a roughly coursed face to the

bank on its south side. No corresponding face could be identified on the north side, which may have been disturbed. The top of the natural deposits was at a higher level on the south side to that on the north. Slate deposit 003 ran over this bank.

Cuts 019 and 020
It was not possible to ascertain the significance of these features, which appeared to post-date the slate spread.

The burials
Portions of five burials were located at the north end of Trench 1a. All were aligned east-west.

Burial 007 was represented by the eastern end-stone and a lintel-stone of a probable cist grave. This may have been an infant burial, but too little of the cist occurred within the trench to be able to fully characterize it.

Burial 008 was represented by the western part of a probable adult burial (Photo 19). The north and south sides of the grave were each lined with single (within the trench at least) large, probably intentionally quarried shale slabs. There were no lintel-stones evident in the trench.

Burial 009 was a small cist, probably of an infant (Photo 19). It fell entirely within the trench and had end-stones, side-stones and three lintel-stones, all water worn, flattish local stone.

Burial 010 was suggested by part of an east-west aligned probable humerus and a water worn flattish stone in the vicinity.

Burial 011 was represented by the western part of a plain, oval dug grave of a probable adult (Photo 19). There was no apparent cist structure. The in-situ skull was located.

Trench 2 (Photo 15)

Trench 2 was located in an area of low-lying ground close to the car park area, to ascertain the presence or absence of significant archaeological features further inland, between the burials and the present church. Initially, a layer of orange clay silt that extended across the entire trench was thought to be a re-deposited layer associated with the lime burning. This layer is now thought to be a natural deposit. Beneath this layer, part of a meandering palaeochannel was revealed. The channel contained water worn sandstone cobbles and pebbles in a loose grey matrix of coarse sand. Several pieces of struck flint were recovered from the palaeochannel while cleaning the feature for photography. These may have been transported from elsewhere, within the palaeochannel. Plans and sections of this trench have not been included in this report.

Trench 3 (Photo 14)

Trench 3 was located to ascertain if burials continued eastward from the north end of Trench 1a. A layer of pebbles and a spread of cockleshells recorded in the trench section may represent a crude surface associated with the lime-burning industry. Otherwise, no significant features or deposits were located within this trench, which became increasingly wet and silty with depth. The character of the deposits suggests that this was an area of wet land associated with the nearby watercourse and pond that has now been enclosed by a stone wall.

No evidence of cut features or burials was identified. With hindsight, the

geophysical survey may indicate a linear feature running between Trench 1a and Trench 3 at right angles to the ditch in Trench 4 (see Figure 6). Plans and sections of this trench have not been included in this report.

Trench 4 (Figure 11)

Trench 4 aimed to ascertain the possible impacts of later industrial activity upon the cemetery features. The trench was located on an area of raised ground thought likely to be a spoil tip of material associated with lime burning. The trench was also located close to the cliff, in order to identify the character of features most immediately under threat from coastal erosion.

Walls 013 and 014
Within the trench, these two walls formed the northernmost corner of a northwest-southeast aligned stone-built building (Photos 22 and 23). The crudely faced, earth-bonded masonry walls were constructed from rough coursed, crudely dressed local stone. The walls were 0.60m wide and survived to a maximum height of 0.70m. There was no evidence of a foundation cut for the walls which appeared to be built directly upon the natural geology, however, it was not possible to ascertain whether the entire area occupied by the building had been terraced into the natural geology. It was not possible to establish the total dimensions of the building.

Inside the building, at its northern end, there was slight evidence of a thin surface of small rounded pebbles and heat affected clay compacted into the top of the natural 'rab' (layer 015). Small fragments of post-medieval glazed pottery were recovered during cleaning of the interior of the building for photography.

Ditch 017
Cleaning down to the top of natural geology within the building revealed an earlier ditch that ran beneath wall 014 on a roughly east-west alignment (Photo 24). The ditch was u-shaped in profile, 0.70m wide and 0.40m deep. Cut 017 in Trench 1a may be the easterly continuation (and terminus) of the same ditch. Retrospective scrutiny of the geophysical survey may suggest that this ditch continues east before turning a right angle and running north between Trench 1a and Trench 3 (see Figures 4 - 6).

A bulk soil sample of the ditch fill was taken with the hope of recovering sufficient charcoal to obtain dating evidence from the feature.

CLIFF FACE OBSERVATIONS

A series of photographs of the cliff face were taken to record features being actively eroded (see Photos 5 – 13 and Figure 8). What they illustrate is open to debate, but the interpretations offered here are an assessment of the character of natural and archaeological deposits and their vulnerability to coastal erosion.

Photo 5
Photo 5 shows what appear to be large stones overlying a layer of slate fragments. These presumably derive from a nearby collapsed building of uncertain function or antiquity. The underlying deposits appear to be naturally lain mixed sands and shale overlying solid bedrock. These deposits and any archaeology that overlies them appear at high risk from coastal erosion.

Photo 6
The layer of slate beneath the scale appears to overlie weathered bedrock that in turn overlies solid bedrock. The slate may be contained within a cut feature, since it seems hard to imagine how over 0.5m of overburden could have built up in this location. Evidence of active erosion is apparent.

Photo 7
The photo shows part of a stone wall. It appears to be of a different construction style to the building revealed in Trench 4, and has the potential to be of earlier origin. Deposits in this location have obviously been subject to erosion in the past, but the turf covering suggests this is not at present an immediate threat. The wall is, however, subject to erosion and damage from people using this location as a route onto the beach. This feature could be a last vestige of the chapel that is traditionally believed to have already been lost to coastal erosion.

Photo 8
This photo shows at least one, cist grave (above the scale). To the left of the scale is a possible 'dug' grave, although this may be a natural feature. As was the case in Trench 1a, the lintel stones of the cist grave lie at the level of the top of the 'rab' bedrock. While the 'rab' is relatively robust, and subject to gradual erosion, the topsoil is subject to more rapid erosion, perhaps exacerbated by 'wrenching' effect of the turf cover in storms.

Photo 9
Photo 9 shows another group of graves. These may be a discrete cluster of burials or a general continuation of burials throughout the cemetery. This group are located on a small 'headland' and are therefore being more actively eroded than those features set slightly further back.

Photo 10
The same 'channelling' effect of the bedrock that protects the area between Photos 9 and 10 is probably also responsible for the increased effects of erosion depicted in Photo 10. It remains uncertain whether the cist and dug graves in Photo 10 are a discrete cluster or a continuation of the group in Photo 9.

Photos 11 and 12
Photo 11 was taken in 1990 and graphically illustrates the extent of damage to the cist graves between then and now (Photo 12).

Photo 13
Between the locations of Photo 12 and Photo 13 there are no graves apparent. This is not surprising if ditch 017 is accepted as the boundary to the cemetery. The presence of several large rocks in Photo 13, however, does suggest that archaeological features of some description are present in this location.

DISCUSSION

The cemetery

From the evidence of the graves eroding from the cliff, coupled with the burials revealed in Trench 1, it appears that the cemetery is not completely filled with graves. Instead they may be arranged in groups, or possibly rows, separated by areas devoid of burials.

Bearing in mind the presumed early origins of the cemetery, and the two Carbon dates from AD 810-1090 (2 sigma) and AD 1650 (2 sigma) it would seem reasonable to suggest that the cemetery was in constant use until the present church and churchyard had been established. Given, however, that the original cemetery appears not to have been full, it may be that the later burial was placed in the former cemetery because burial within the later graveyard was for some reason not deemed appropriate. If St Brides was indeed a multiple church site, there may be other, (as yet undiscovered) burial locations in the area.

The excavation has identified two possible boundaries to the cemetery. Ditch 017 is the most likely candidate since it is demonstrably earlier than the probable post medieval building in Trench 4. In addition, an extension of the known orientation of the ditch towards the cliff would lie to the west of (and would therefore effectively enclose) all the known burials.

An extension of the stone bank 004 would not enclose all the known burials. It is more likely to be of post-medieval origin.

Post medieval activity

The building in Trench 4 appeared to have been constructed directly on top of the natural geology, although it is possible that the top of the geology had been levelled off to form a flat building platform. In Trench 1b, the fact that the slate and mortar layer was found to lie almost directly upon the top of natural geology also suggests that the area had been stripped to provide a solid surface. The survival of ditch 017, however, may suggest that any reduction in the level of the top of natural was not sufficient to have removed evidence of earlier features. The absence of evidence of burials in Trench 4 and 1b therefore is unlikely to be because the later activity has destroyed them. Instead it suggests that the burials exposed in the cliff face do not extend as far back as the building in Trench 4.

Bank 004 may have been a boundary to the lime-working, or building area, since in Trench 1a the layer of slate and mortar runs over bank 004 and rises to the surface on its north side. This suggests that on the north side of the bank, the ground was not stripped down to the top of natural.

The discovery of these presumably post-medieval building remains adds another dimension to the archaeology and cultural heritage of the site that will need to be considered in any mitigation proposals for the erosion issue.

Prehistoric activity

A small number of struck flint waste flakes and struck flint pebbles were recovered from the palaeochannel in Trench 2 and from the topsoil in Trench 4. These have not yet been assessed. Several finds of worked flint dated to the Mesolithic, Neolithic and bronze Age are recorded from the surrounding area in the HER (PRNs 2608, 2619, 2621, 2622, 9611, 9957, 7354, 12226), and the evidence for prehistoric activity at St Brides adds time depth to the potential significance of the archaeological resource of the site. The flints from Trench 2

may, however, have been transported in the palaeochannel from elsewhere. It was not possible to ascertain whether a buried prehistoric land surface survives at St Brides.

Coastal erosion

There are several issues relating to the coastal erosion at St Brides. The erosion is a visible, continuing and appreciable process of 'loss' of (and perceived 'damage' to) a valued landscape, location and environment. The issue is complicated by the presence of some well-known and potentially nationally significant archaeology that is a finite resource being progressively lost to coastal erosion. This process is of concern to PCNPA, visitors and residents alike.
Although it is a 'problem' about which something perhaps needs to be done, in the wider context of the consequences of climate change and sea level rise, the erosion at St Brides is essentially a natural process that cannot be easily stopped or prevented.

The form of the underlying bedrock that extends out from the cliff face (coupled with wind direction) appears to have some bearing upon the erosive effects of the sea, by breaking, deflecting or directing the force of the waves. This may account for the good turf cover on the cliff face located between photos 9 and 10. The presence of the turf will undoubtedly protect any graves that may be present (although the turf cover also prevents the presence or absence of graves being ascertained).

It is perhaps significant that the locations where the burials are present and being actively eroded are the most vertical parts of the cliff face. In these locations, turf on the cliff top may be having a damaging effect on the topsoil and deposits containing archaeological features. As the loose mats of turf that overhang the cliff top are buffeted by wind and waves, they may be exposing and loosening the soil, making it more vulnerable to erosion.

If the observations made in this report about the possible factors that influence the pattern of erosion at St. Brides (turf cover, shelter and the alignment of the underlying strata of solid bedrock) can be confirmed by an appropriate specialist, it may be possible to formulate a solution to the erosion by making relatively small adjustments to the cliff face.

Options might include:

- Altering the angle of the cliff face to make it less vertical and to encourage the re-establishment of turf cover.
- The strategic placement of a few large rocks at the cliff base to deflect or break the effects of wave action.
- Pinning down or trimming back the turf on the cliff edge to break the cycle of topsoil erosion.

In the absence of an immediate solution therefore, the process needs to be managed, either through practical intervention, a managed retreat, or an agreed level of 'acceptable loss'.

Archaeological mitigation

Unless the loss of the archaeology without it being recorded is agreed to be acceptable, some degree of 'preservation by record' would seem to be the most appropriate (and the most cost effective) mitigation for the loss of cultural heritage. The intermittent monitoring of the gradual loss of the graves that has occurred to date has not provided an adequate amount of useful information about the site.

Mitigation for the loss of archaeology now, might reduce its significance as an issue in the long-term, but potential problems with reinstatement following archaeological excavation may be present short-term landscape conservation problems. Mitigation of the loss of the early medieval cemetery would therefore need to be balanced with the environmental issues.

The excavation suggests that burials are contained within a defined cemetery area by a possible boundary ditch, but that burials are not present throughout the entire cemetery area. From an archaeological point of view, an 'open area' excavation, would enable a clear idea of the distribution of features to be recorded in plan. This might not however, be the most appropriate course of action from other points of view.

Archaeological mitigation as part of erosion control, would most probably involve excavating only those burials that are being actively eroded or are under imminent threat. An alternative strategy might be to sacrifice the currently eroding burials, but to fully excavate the remaining archaeology that currently survives undisturbed a bit further inland. How close to the cliff edge such an excavation could go before it risked exacerbating the erosion process, would need to be established in consultation.

The early medieval period in Wales is under represented in the archaeological record and a framework for future archaeological research (Edwards et al 2005) identifies several issues and research questions relating specifically to early medieval cemeteries. Any mitigation strategy would ideally need to address the wider research goals for the period.

Future work

During the current excavation a small quantity of ceramics and struck flints were recovered. A bulk soil sample was also taken from the possible cemetery enclosure ditch in the hope of recovering suitable charcoal for an AMS date. Analysis of this material could be undertaken as part of future archaeological work at the site, or perhaps with Cadw contingency funding.

If excavation of the cemetery is to occur in future, on-site conservation of the fragile skeletal material may need to be considered in the project design. Other specialist input and analysis may also be desirable. Based on the level of visitors to the excavation in March, a high level of community and visitor interest in any future archaeological excavations could be anticipated. An outreach 'officer' would be a necessary staffing requirement, and potential public sensibilities over the excavation of human burials would need to be considered.

Community engagement

The majority of the excavation work on this project was undertaken by a small number of local volunteers from the 'Coastlands History Society' through liaison with the PCNP Archaeologist. Future archaeological work could again involve local communities, perhaps as part of the Cadw funded ARFORDIR (Coastal Archaeology and Community Engagement Project) Pilot project. St Brides is a very popular visitor location and future excavation and erosion management at the site could provide an effective demonstration of the conservation and management work of Cadw, PCNP and DAT. Public access to and involvement with future excavations would however need to be well catered for and effectively managed, requiring at least one designated member of staff to undertake outreach activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavations have provided useful information about the nature, extent and distribution of archaeological features in the vicinity of the cliff edge at St Brides Haven. The extent of the cemetery has possibly been established, but it has also been suggested that the burials may be arranged in isolated groups or possibly in rows within the cemetery. This makes the surviving actively eroding burials both more interesting and more significant as a diminishing resource. There is potential for part of the supposed former chapel to still survive on the immediate cliff edge (Photo 7). The excavation has also established that there are also archaeological features relating to later periods of activity at the site.

Future management could be led either from an archaeological perspective, or a coastal erosion perspective. Archaeologically, the site at St Brides is apparently small, finite, and, unusually for many early medieval cemetery sites has reasonable bone preservation. This suggests it could provide important information to better our understanding of this little understood period in the history of Wales. As such, the site is of potential national importance. Further excavation would also provide important information for comparison with other coastal cemetery sites in the region that have been investigated through Cadw funded projects. That the site is also being actively lost to coastal erosion increases the justification for further archaeological excavation at the site.

Although observations on the process of erosion at the site have been made in this report, a detailed study of the erosion process at the site by a coastal engineer would identify with more certainty, which locations are most immediately under threat of loss, and potential mitigation to reduce the rate or impact of erosion. Archaeological mitigation could then be addressed as part of an erosion management plan.

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Parish of St Brides Tithe Map, 1839.

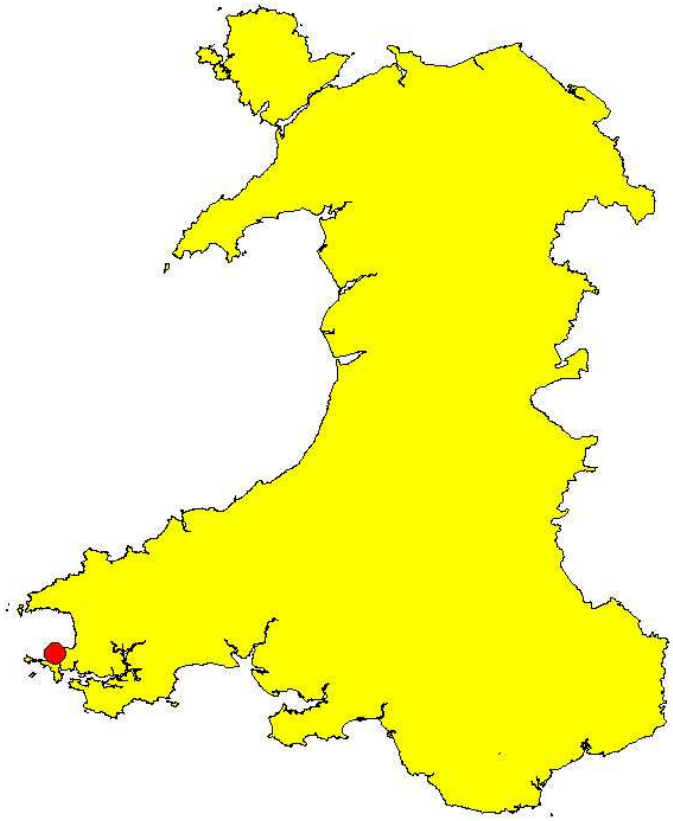

Figure 1: Location of St Brides Bay

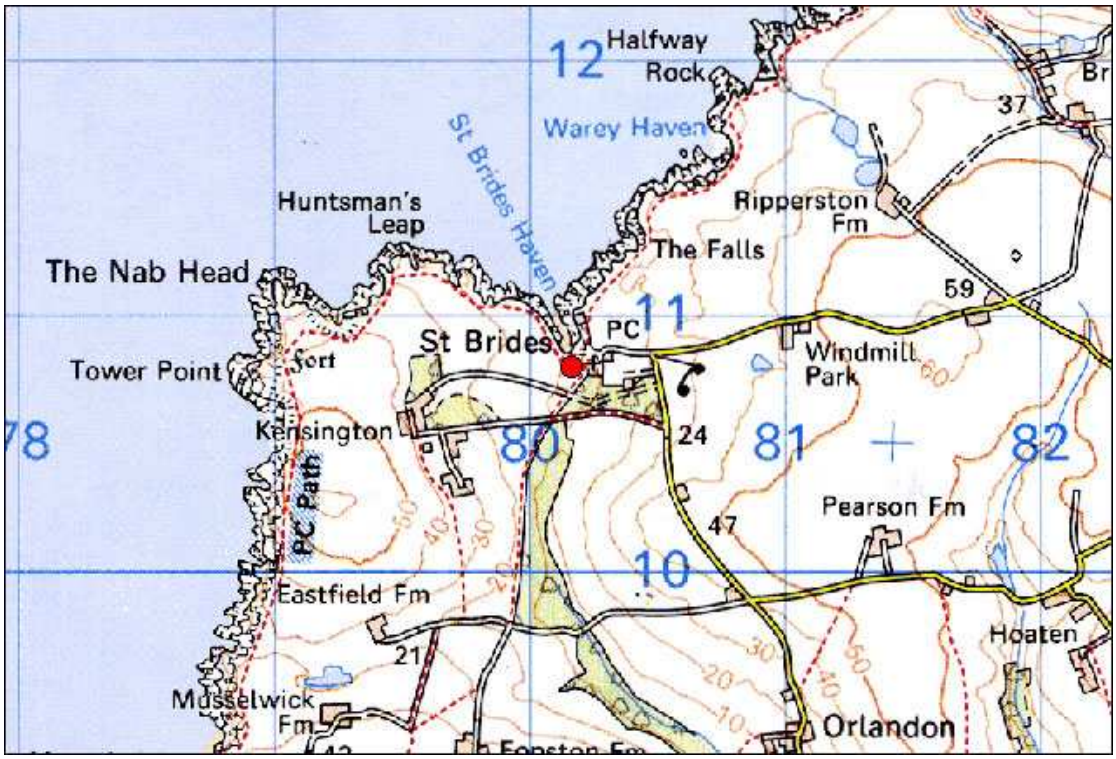

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Figure 2: Site location map

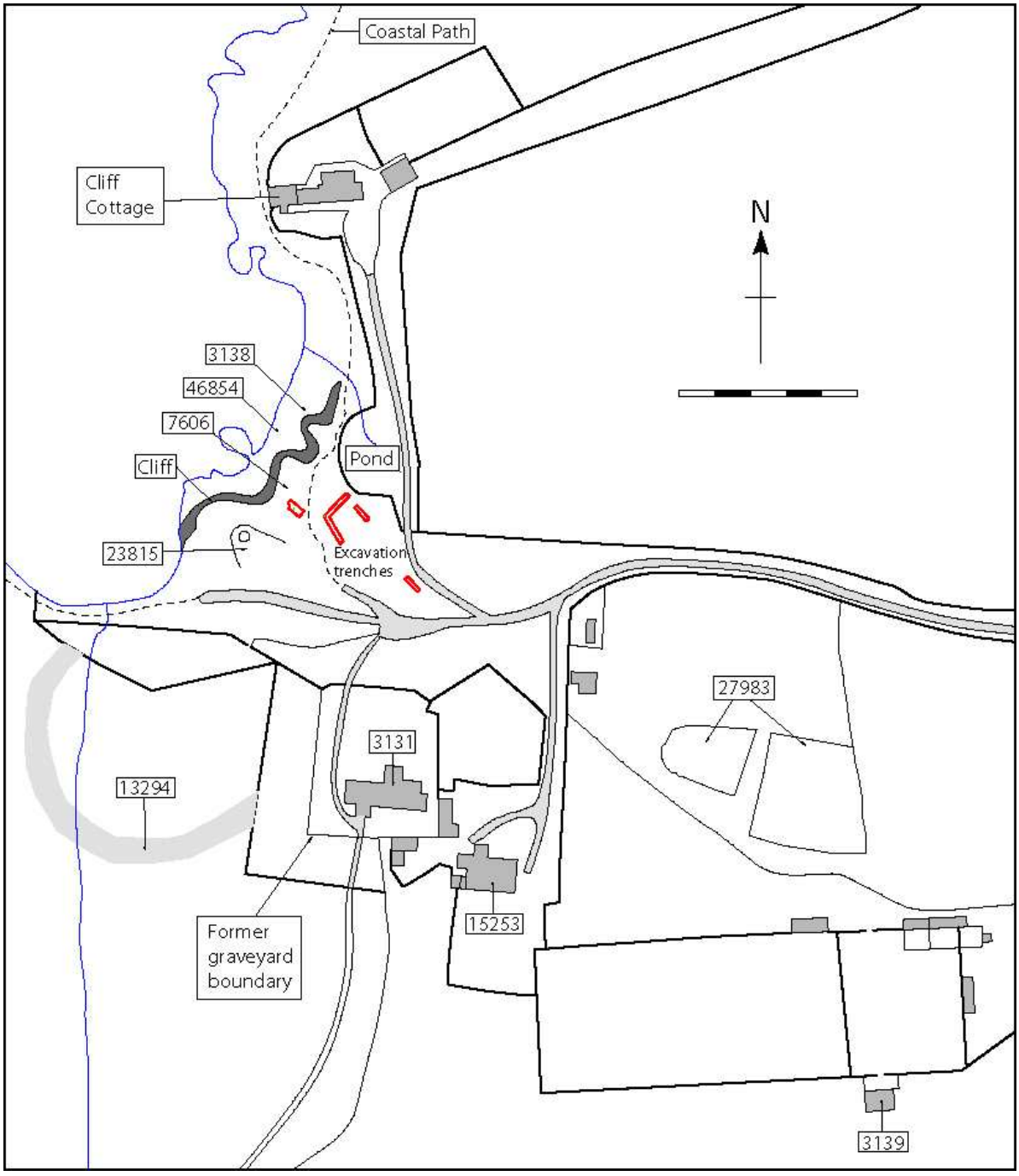

Figure 3: Excavation areas and surrounding features (PRN numbers) referred to in text

Figure 4: Trench locations in relation to geophysical survey

Figure 5: Geophysical survey

Figure 6: Interpretation of geophysical survey

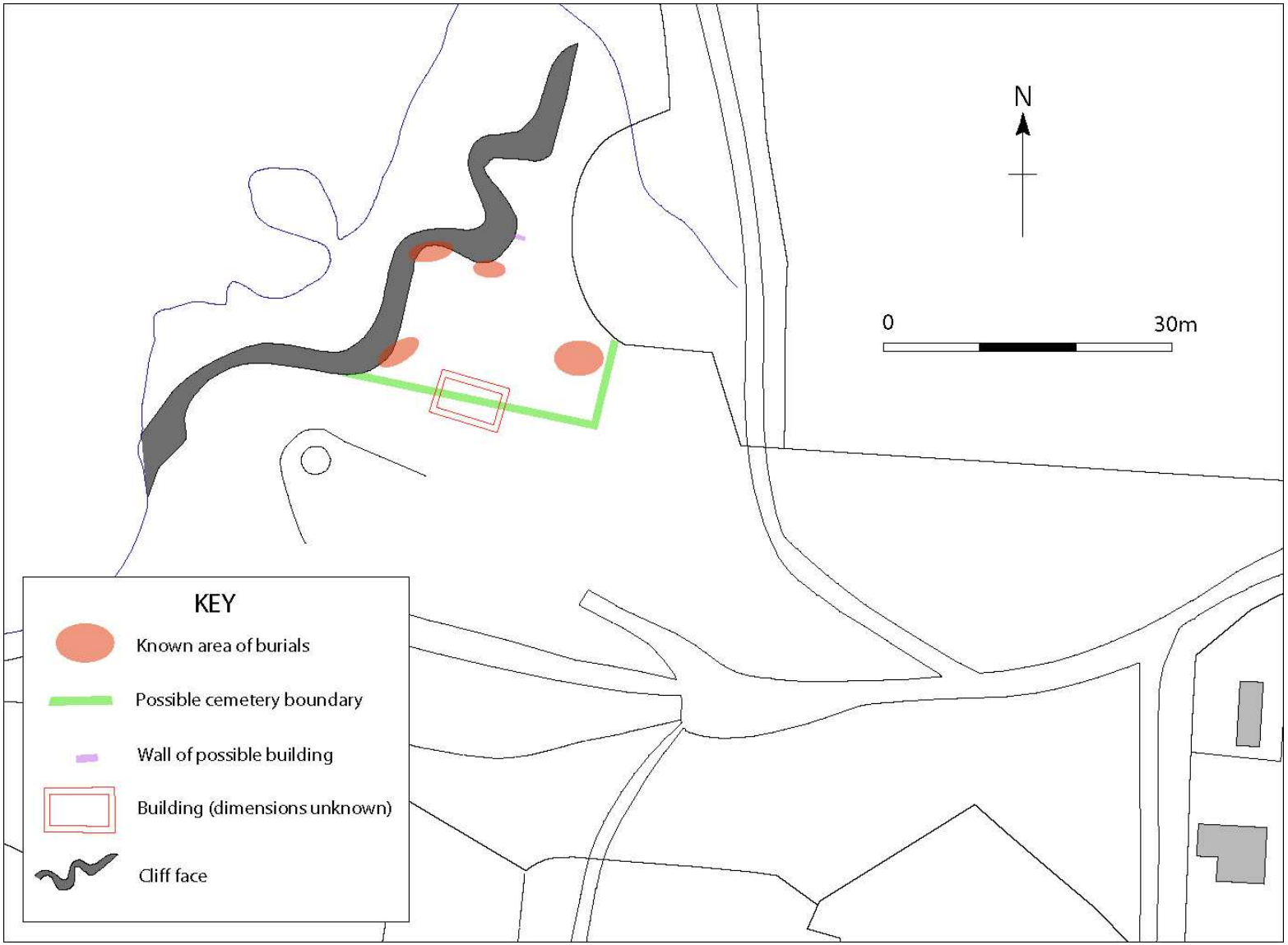

Figure 7: Plan showing distribution of archaeological features

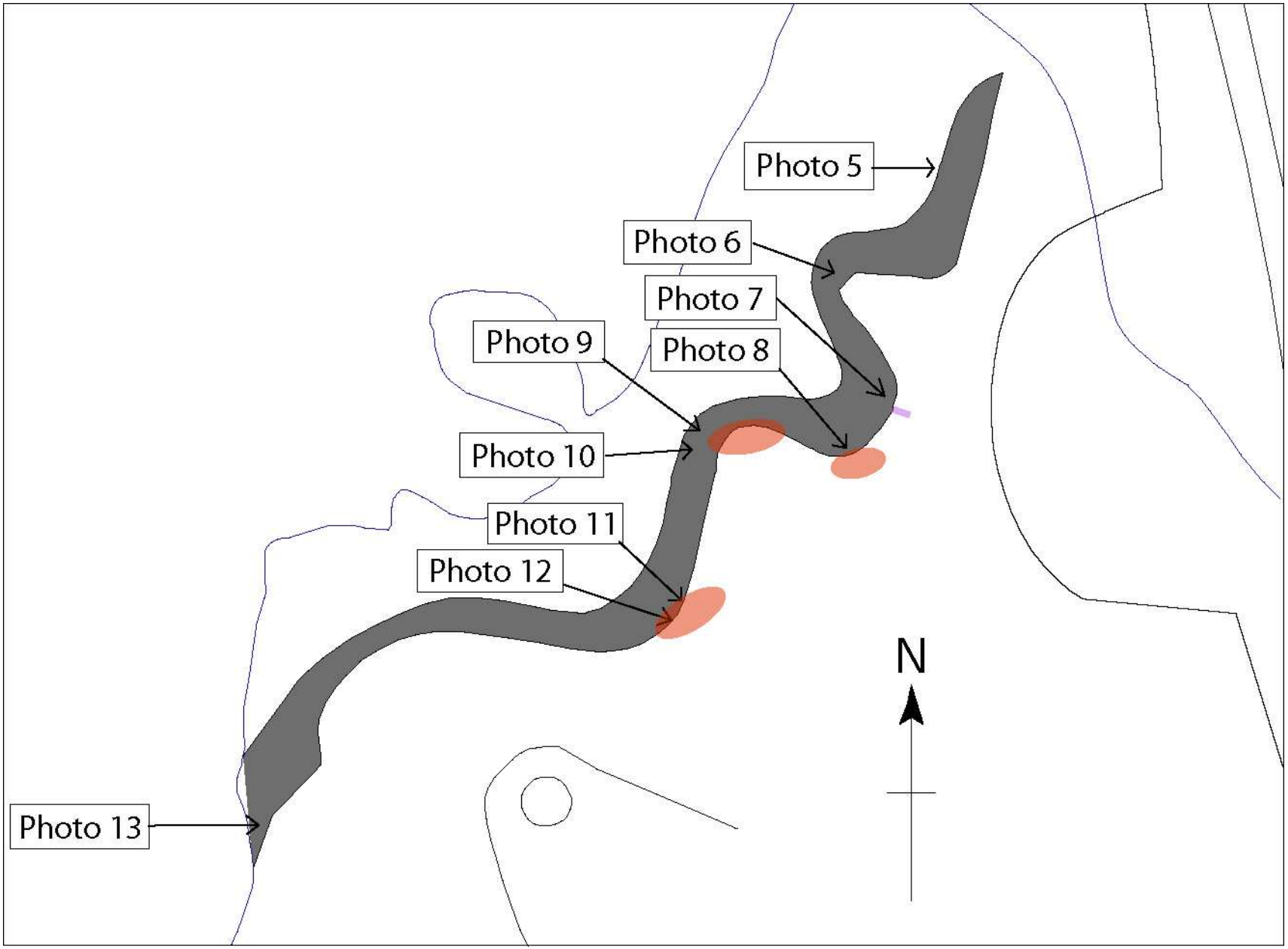

Figure 8: Plan showing location of photographs of features eroding from cliff face.

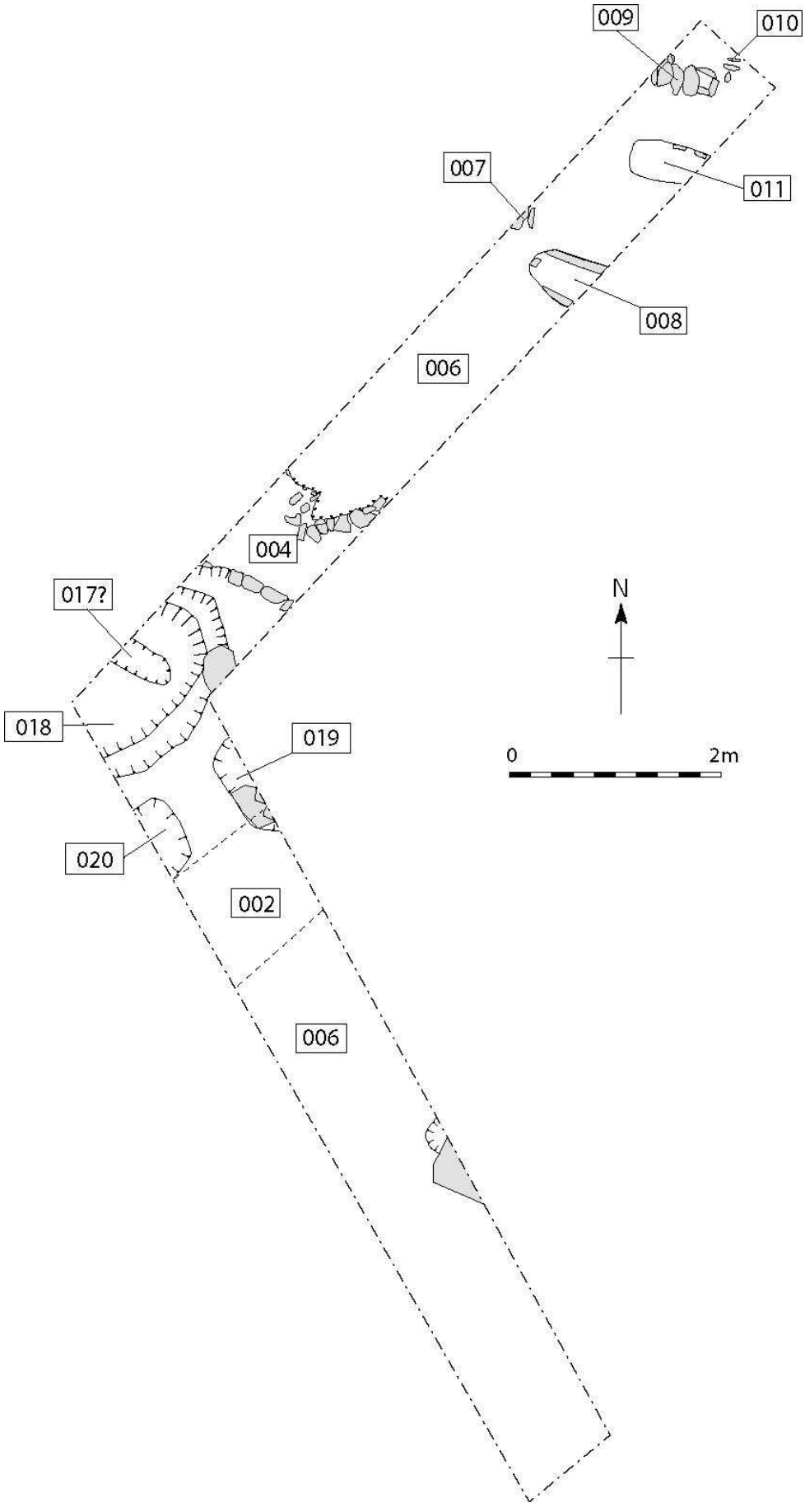

Figure 9: Plan of features in Trenches 1a and 1b

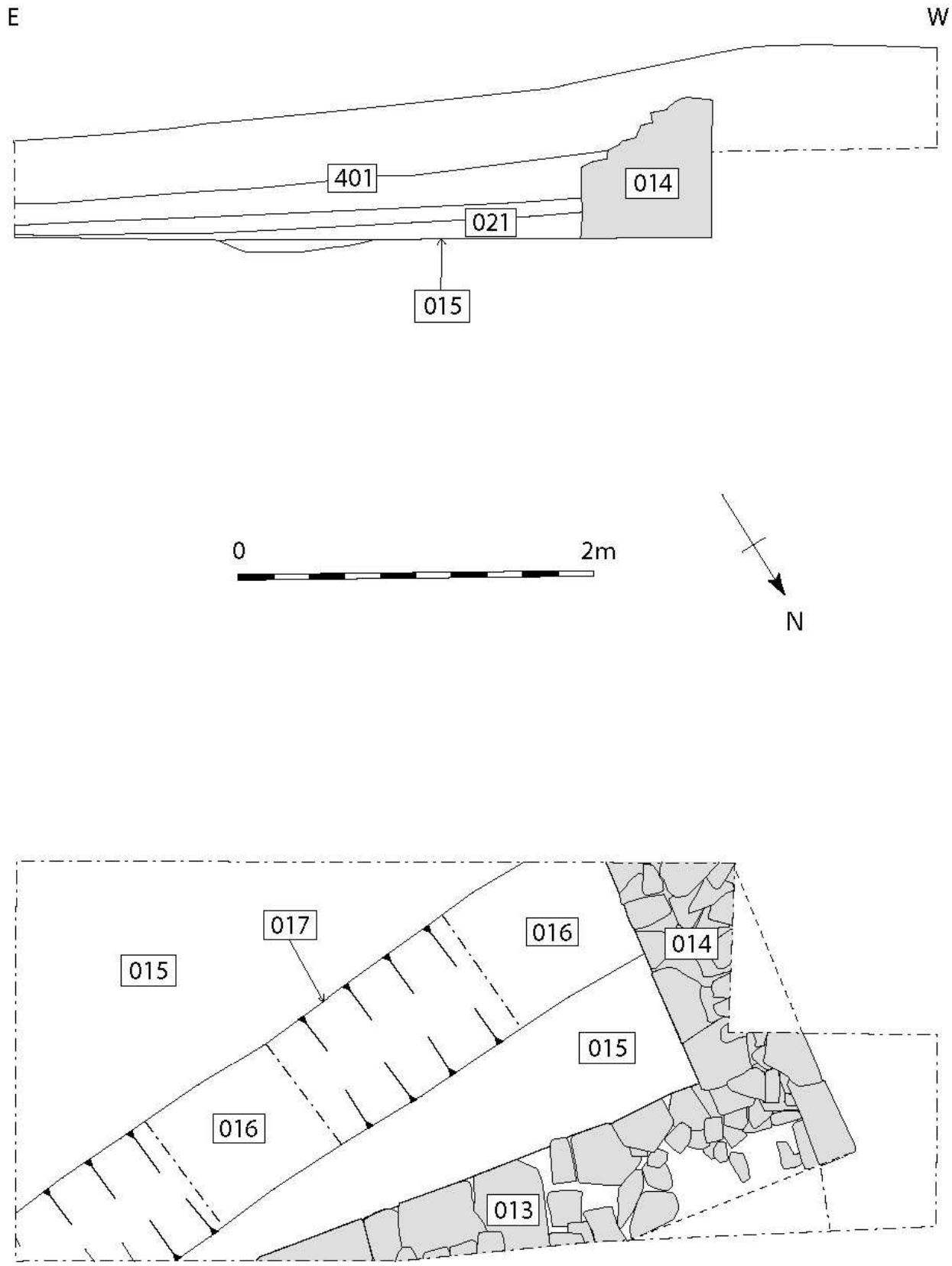

Figure 10: Plan and section of Trench 4

Plate 1: Aerial photograph of St Brides

Photo 1: General view of St Brides looking east

Photo 2: St Brides churchyard, with the earthwork bank marking the earlier churchyard boundary

Photo 3: The north wall of Cliff Cottage, showing the blocked arched doorway and small window believed to indicate that the building was formerly a 'fishermen's chapel'.

Photo 4: View of St Brides church looking east. The possible enclosure cropmark would run from the churchyard wall down the slope to the flatter ground below.

Photo 5: Photo showing stones and slates of a possible structure (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 6: Photo showing slates of a possible structure below the scale (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 7: East-west aligned possible wall below scale (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 8: Lintel and end stones of at least one cist grave, with a possible dug grave to the left (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 9: Stones of several probable cist graves (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 10: Stones of several more probable cist graves (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 11: Photo of eroding cist graves taken in 1990 (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 12: Photo of the same location taken in 2009. The lower cist grave visible has been completely lost (see fig 8for location).

Photo 13: Stones of possible structure (see fig 8 for location)

Photo 14: Trench 3 section profile

Photo 15: Trench 2 palaeochannel after excavation

Photo 16: Trench 1b rubble 002 overlying slate layer 003

Photo 17: Trench 1b after removal of rubble, showing crushed ridge tiles on top of slates 003

Photo 18: Trench 1a. Stone bank 004

Photo 19: Trench 1b. Showing graves 008, 011 and 009 (left to right)

Photo 20: Trench 1a showing face of bank 004 and burnt fill 022 of pit 018

Photo 21: Trench 1a after removal of fill 022 from pit 018 showing possible ditch terminal 017 to left of scale

Photo 22: Trench 4. Interior of building

Photo 23: Trench 4. Detail of walls 013 and 014

Photo 24: Trench 4 after excavation of parts of ditch 017

THE PEMBROKESHIRE CEMETERIES PROJECT
EXCAVATIONS AT ST BRIDES BAY 2009

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2009/

March 2009
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Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadausydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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