

**ARFORDIR  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION 2011  
ST ISHMAEL,  
CARMARTHENSHIRE,  
DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE**



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION 2011**  
**ST ISHMAEL, CARMARTHENSHIRE,**  
**DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE**

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**ARFFORDIR – ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION 2011:  
ST ISHMAEL, CARMARTHENSHIRE,  
DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE: PRN 99088**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>SUMMARY</b>	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>Project Set-Up</b>	2
<b>Scope of the Project</b>	2
<b>Abbreviations</b>	2
<b>THE SITE</b>	3
<b>Location</b>	4
<b>Archaeological Background</b>	4
<b>INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY</b>	6
<b>SUMMARY OF 2010 INVESTIGATION RESULTS</b>	8
<b>RESULTS OF 2011 INVESTIGATION OF BUILDING 2</b>	9
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	17
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	19
<b>Further Work</b>	19
<b>SOURCES</b>	20
<b>FIGURES</b>	
<b>Figure 1:</b> Location of St Ishmael	3
<b>Figure 2:</b> Site area in relation to adjacent scars and other features showing full extent of deserted medieval village	7
<b>Figure 3:</b> Main excavation area over Building 2	13
<b>Figure 4:</b> Section to south of Building 2 showing possible boundary ditch [244], beam slot [219] and pit [225]	15
<b>PHOTOGRAPHS</b>	
Photo 1: Initial clearance of the sand dunes	6
Photo 2: Excavation of Building 2, showing wall (200) to left, with doorway (201) and wall (205) to right	10
Photo 3: Fully uncovered doorway to Building 2 (201)	10
Photo 4: Paved area inside Building 2 (248) to east of entrance	11
Photo 5: Clay Layer (215) to left and stone kerb (214)	12
Photo 6: Part of face of dune investigated to south of excavation area showing a number of archaeological features	14
Photo 7: Area of possible ditch [238] below stones	16
Photo 8: Partially excavated possible beam slot [240] to left of stones	16

**ARFORDIR – ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION 2011**  
**ST ISHMAEL, CARMARTHENSIRE,**  
**DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE (SN 2891 2086)**

**SUMMARY**

*As part of the Arfordir Project, a second small-scale archaeological investigation was undertaken of the deserted medieval settlement at St Ishmael, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 2891 2086). The site was first identified following an episode of coastal erosion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and has subsequently been noted and monitored on an intermittent basis, which has highlighted how the site has been eroded over many years. Although it lies at the very edge of the strand line of the highest spring tides, and is mostly affected during stormy weather, a considerable portion of the site has already been lost to the sea and erosion continues.*

*The investigations were undertaken by members of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust and a number of volunteers from the local area and further afield.*

*The 2011 investigation involved the removal of an area of sand dune over the footprint of Building 2, as defined during the 2010 investigations. To the south of the building two areas of the face of the dune were cleaned to ascertain the presence or absence of archaeological features.*

*Building 2 comprised a stone built structure with the majority of its western wall lying at the very edge of the existing sand dune. A large stone edged doorway was visible within the wall, which had two internal steps leading up to a paved entrance area. As far as could be ascertained within the constraints of the excavation area there was a room to both the north and south which had beaten earth floor layers. These beaten earth floors and the stepped entrance suggest it was for human habitation as opposed to housing animals. Due to water-logging it was not possible to differentiate between different layers within these floors. In the room to the south a clay bank had been constructed on the inside of the western wall, which was edged to the east by a line of kerb stones. The function of this feature is unclear. To the south of the building the two areas of the face of the dune which were cleaned revealed a number of other archaeological features suggesting ditches, pits and two possible beam-slots indicative of timber structures. Medieval pottery was recovered from the excavation area which nearly all dates from the late-12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with a single sherd of 16<sup>th</sup> century pot also recovered.*

*It is considered likely that the settlement was established towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century, possibly at the time when Anglo-Norman occupation of this part of Carmarthen Bay was at its high point. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century activity seems to have reduced, possibly as a result of climatic factors making life within the village difficult, perhaps associated with episodes of flooding or besandment.*

*Further monitoring of the site in since 2010 concurs with the suggested erosion rate of the base of the dunes at around 0.15 to 0.30m a year. The archaeological remains that survive at the site are still under threat from coastal erosion, and the investigation has demonstrated that a significant amount of archaeological information still survives beneath the dune. Further monitoring of the site will be needed, perhaps supplemented with larger schemes of recording when needed.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Project Set-Up**

The archaeological investigation was undertaken at St Ishmael, Carmarthenshire through the Arfordir – Coastal Heritage project and was funded by Cadw grant aid and DAT. The work was undertaken to supplement the small-scale investigations undertaken in February 2010.

The investigation was arranged by Dyfed Archaeological Trust in consultation with Andrew Patterson, the Common Land Officer of Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) and Neil Matthew, of the Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW). The land is recorded as being common land, and thus CCC owned, in the absence of anyone else claiming the land. The site lies within two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Arfordir Pen-Bre / Pembrey Coast SSSI and Afon Tywi SSSI (the two meet almost mid-way along the site and include all of the intertidal zone as far as the sand dunes). Consents were again granted by CCW for the works, as had been granted in 2010.

### **Scope of the Project**

The September 2011 archaeological investigation aimed to build upon the results of that undertaken in February 2010. Whereas the 2010 work involved limited intrusive work, aiming more to define the extents of the settlement, the 2011 works were aimed to undertake more detailed excavation, specifically targeting the area of Building 2.

The work exposed an area of the interior of this structure, as it appeared to be the best preserved of the four defined in 2010, since all but the western wall lay still buried within the dunes. The slope of the dunes over this building was also less than for the other structures and so a safe working area could be achieved.

The works were undertaken as part of the Arfordir project with volunteers from the local area and further afield.

### **Abbreviations**

Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER<sup>1</sup>) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

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<sup>1</sup> Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo.





**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

## THE SITE

### Location

The deserted medieval village at St Ishmael is located to the south of the Church of St Ishmael, Carmarthenshire (centred on NGR SN 3625 0798).

Topographically the site is located beneath the sand dunes on the western side of the West Wales Line railway, on the edge of Carmarthen Bay, at a height of c.5m above Ordnance Datum, at the strand line (Spring Tide mark).

The underlying geology of the site is apparently comprised of boulder clays, lying upon glacially derived rocks, which in turn lie upon the Old Red Sandstone solid geology which rises and forms the hills to the east.

### Archaeological Background

A short summary archaeological background is included below and will be expanded upon for a full publication report to be produced in 2012-2013.

The remains of the site first came to public attention following a severe storm in 1896, although the site may have already been known locally for many years. The effects of the storm on the deserted village were reported upon in *The Welshman* on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1900, which stated that the exposed walls 'were in some places a foot or two high. They formed rooms, and showed unmistakable fireplaces.... The ruins extended some two or three hundred yards on the side exposed to the sea.' (*Arch. Camb.* 1900).

It is thought that this article gave rise to the idea of a village lost beneath the waves of Carmarthen Bay, reported on in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in the bibliographic notes associated with an article 'Llansaint' (Evans 1907) which stated that following the storm of 1896, a local farmer removed 40 to 50 wagon loads of stone from the site. A further reference regarding an excursion of the Cambrian Archaeological Association to Llansaint states that: '..passing on the road the buried village of Hawton, demolished by a tidal wave in 1639 (*Arch. Camb.* 1907, 239)'. No source is given for this statement of a tidal wave in 1639, and the archaeological evidence indicates that the village had been abandoned long before this date.

Some handwritten notes and drawings are in the collection of the Royal Commission for the Archaeological and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) and give some idea of the remains visible at that time. The RCAHMW commissioners visited St Ishmael to examine the remains in September 1912 (RCAHMW 1917). Their notes describe that they found a ledge of red marl exposed for a distance of some one hundred yards into which the remains of stone walls were set. One set of walls they examined were interpreted as a room 6ft 6 ins by 6ft 8 ins with walls 2 ft wide and 15 ins high. Some charcoal was found within the structure and nearby a charred pole set into the marl was discovered.

A small-scale excavation carried out by Professor J W W Stephens in 1913 resulted in the finding of a silver penny of Edward I (1272 to 1307), a medieval sickle, the bowl of a leaden spoon and pottery dating from between the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (*Arch. Camb.* 1949). Animal bones recovered from the site were from at least one Shetland pony, horses, sheep and red deer. The site was observed and recorded intermittently during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably by Heather and Terry James (2003). A small scale investigation was undertaken by Dyfed Archaeological Trust in 1996, and the information will be incorporated into the publication report to be written next year. Further observation, monitoring and research has been undertaken by Owen Harris in



recent years, and his information and assistance has been invaluable in the preparation of this document.

Studies have been carried out to determine the name of the settlement, but this is debated elsewhere. For the purposes of this article we refer to the settlement by the name of St Ishmael.

The stretch of the West Wales Railway at St Ishmael was opened in the 1850s. The construction included the excavation of a shallow cutting through the dune to the east of the site area. The cutting resulted in the sand dune being raised on the seaward side. The level of the railway track does lie above that of known archaeology, but below ground drainage and other structures could potentially have disturbed any underlying archaeological remains. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century sea defences were erected along the front of the dunes. These comprised vertical iron rails (reused railway tracks) with wooden planking inserted between. Many hundreds of tons of foundry waste material were deposited behind the planks. It is presumed these defences were erected to protect the dunes and ultimately the railway behind. Only the vertical iron rails of the sea defences survive in the area of the archaeological site. The present base of the sand dunes lies around 5m inland from the former sea defence line.

The scars that project into Carmarthen Bay (stone areas in amongst the sand) were formerly promontories of land, covered in boulder clays which have been slowly eroded as the sea encroaches inland. A small bay or inlet was probably located between the St Ishmael and Salmon scars, with a sandy bay leading directly to the deserted village. This would have been an ideal place from which to launch boats to exploit marine resources. It is likely that buildings associated with the settlement were present on these promontories of land, but if so, they have long since been destroyed. A circular stone lined feature previously recorded quite far out on Salmon Scar, has been interpreted as a well. A number of fish traps and weirs of medieval date found around other scars in Carmarthen Bay were probably built, managed and exploited by inhabitants of the settlement at St Ishmael.

## INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY

The 2011 investigations targeted the site of Building 2. Following clearance of vegetation, an area of the sand dune was hand excavated to the top of archaeological deposits. The area to the east of the exposed doorway into Building 2 was excavated. It was unfortunately not possible to expose the entire footprint of the structure, due to the depth of archaeology and height of the resultant section through the sand dune. Enough of the footprint was uncovered to determine the structure's layout and provide information regarding its abandonment.

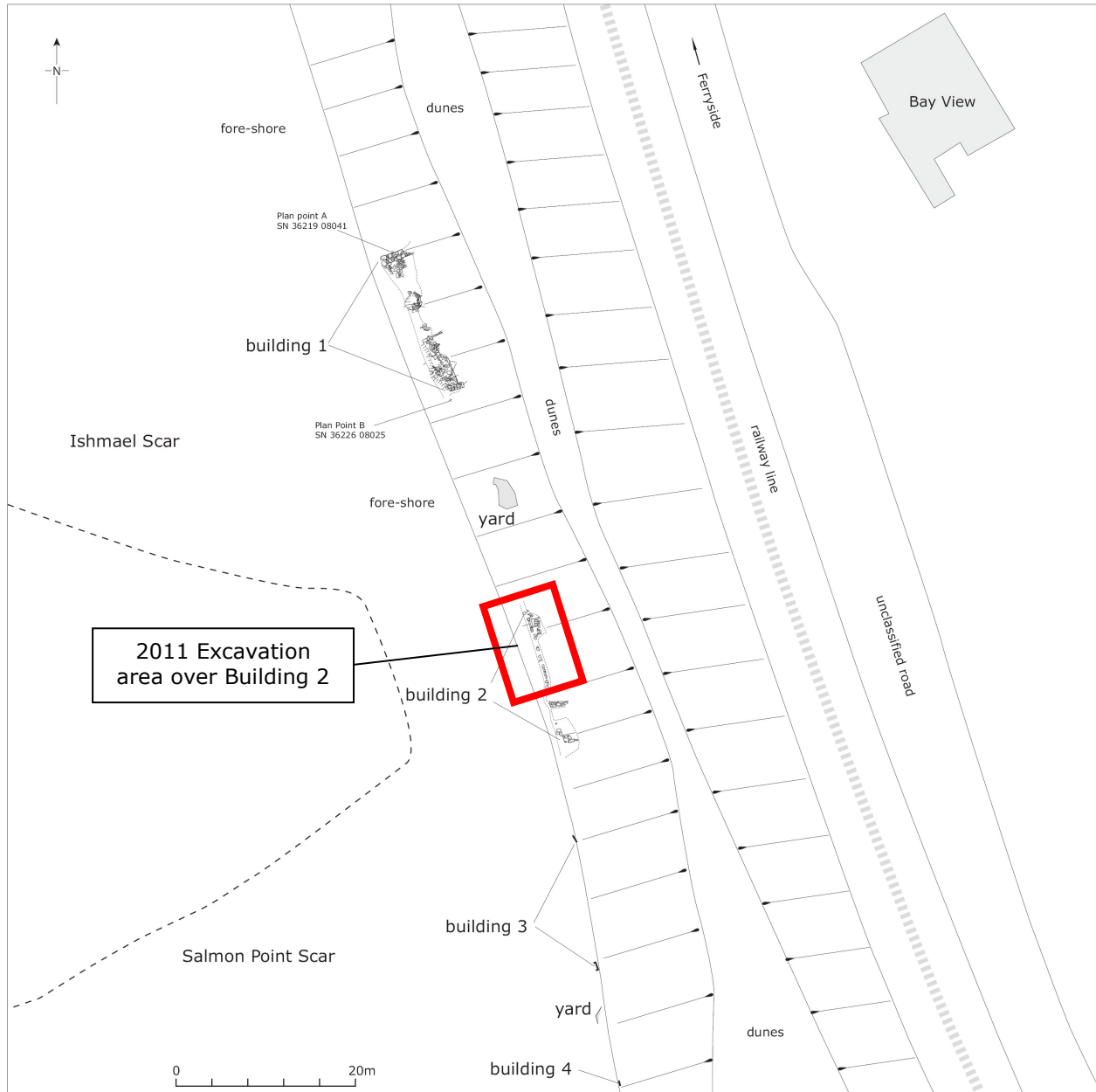
Further investigations were carried out along the base of the sand dune edge, where the dunes lay directly upon underlying clays. The exposed face of the eroded clay was cleaned and limited excavation of archaeological features within it was undertaken.

The exposed remains were hand cleaned and stratigraphically excavated. The archaeological remains were photographed using high resolution digital cameras. Hand drawn plans were prepared of the exposed remains within and around Building 2. Context descriptions were prepared of all deposits and structural elements. The standard Dyfed Archaeological Trust recording methodology was employed at the site.



Photo 1: Initial clearance of the sand dunes

The archaeological works were undertaken with the help and assistance of a number of Arfordir volunteers including Sue Birchall, Miranda Cobb, Arwyn Davies, Barbara Davies, Christine Davies, Martin Davies, Owen Harris, Caralinda Jeffries, Linda Jones and Hazel Wadey. I offer my sincere thanks to all of these individuals, and my apologies to any that I have missed out. The works were supervised by Dyfed Archaeological Trust staff, Menna Bell, James Meek and Hubert Wilson.



**Figure 2:** Site area in relation to adjacent scars and other features showing full extent of deserted medieval village

## **SUMMARY OF 2010 INVESTIGATION RESULTS**

In February 2010 the first of the two Arfordir investigations was undertaken. The aim of this phase of work was to try and define the extent of the settlement. Excavation for this phase of work was kept to a minimum. It involved the removal of a small amount of turf and loose material from the edge of the sand dunes to reveal the exposed parts of the medieval buildings. The areas of stone walls, floors and other features were then recorded and accurately surveyed. Survey was also undertaken to define the edges of the Salmon and St Ishmael scars projecting into Carmarthen Bay, and mapping it all in relation to St Ishmael Church.

The investigation revealed four distinct buildings within the edge of the sand dune, numbered as Building 1, Building 2, Building 3 and Building 4, from north to south (Figure 2). The building stone used in their construction was predominantly local sandstone, but other types of stones including water-worn limestone boulders (presumably picked up from nearby beaches) were also used. The local sandstone is readily available from outcrops along this part of Carmarthen Bay, the nearest lying within 200m to the north of the St Ishmael site (now covered by the railway embankment).

Building 1 was the most northerly building visible within the base of the dunes (Figure 2). It was visible as a series of three east to west aligned walls protruding from the face of the sand dune. The western wall, along the length of the building had been previously eroded away. The wall at the northern end of the structure was substantial, with a similarly substantial one at the southern end. A smaller internal wall was also present. The eastern wall still lies buried within the sand dune. In total the building measured 16.5m in length from north to south, with an internal width of at least 3.1m exposed on the beach. The remains of stone slab floors were revealed within the two end rooms of the buildings, but were absent from the small centrally located area lying directly to the south of the internal wall. A neatly constructed hearth, comprising flat slabs of granite (possibly a reused millstone) edged with smaller, locally sourced blocks, was uncovered within this area. A radiocarbon date was obtained from the charcoal rich fill that sat upon the hearth slab. This context was securely sealed beneath soil deposits presumably laid down following the abandonment of the settlement (and prior to sand inundation). The sample provided a date of between Cal AD 1430 - 1530 / Cal AD 1570 - 1630 (SUERC 32875). The highest probability was for the date to be between the range of Cal AD 1430 – Cal AD 1530.

Building 2 was located around 27m to the south of Building 1, lying roughly central within the defined village extents, and is discussed further below. The investigations demonstrated that the doorway and wall foundation formed the western wall of the building, with the majority of the structure remaining beneath the sand dunes.

Building 3 comprised of two small, east to west aligned walls, projecting through the face of the sand dunes. It lay some 28m south of Building 2. Of the four buildings, this was the most conjectural one. No associated floor surfaces, doorways or steps were found. The two walls were around 15.4m apart.

The most southerly structure, Building 4, comprised a 3m wide room with walls to the north, south and east exposed (Figure 2). The structure lay 10m to the south of the south wall of Building 3. The walls stood to a maximum height of 0.6m.

The areas visible between Buildings 1 and 2 and between Buildings 3 and 4 had suggestions of yards comprised of flat slabs laid upon the underlying clays. They are considered to be yards or paved areas as no walls could be seen that might indicate they were remains of buildings. One yard area lay around 10m to the south of Building 1 and comprised a number of flat sandstone slabs laid to form a



rough surface. An area of the surface approximately 3.5m x 1.6m was exposed, and it is likely that more stretches to the east below the sand dunes. The second yard area lay 4m to the south of Building 3, visible as a small stretch of stones 2m in length sitting on top of the clay within the sand dune face. The top of the surface was only partially exposed, but what was visible suggested a well laid flooring comprising smaller stones of around 0.15m square. A visit in late 2009 recorded a posthole lying directly below this floor, suggesting an earlier phase of activity.

This phase of investigation demonstrated that the archaeological remains of the settlement were visible within a c.100m length of the edge of the sand dune. The first building of the site lies 350m to the south of St Ishmael Church.

## **RESULTS OF 2011 INVESTIGATION OF BUILDING 2**

Building 2 is located around 27m to the south of Building 1, lying roughly central within the defined village extents. The sand dune material removed from above the building contained quantities of stone and also foundry waste as well as occasional plastic bags and bottles. These lay directly upon and partially mixed in to the archaeological levels. This would indicate that the dune had been subject to fairly recent erosion and movement following tidal action and stormy weather, but had subsequently stabilised allowing vegetation to grow back across its surface. This may be an indication of the dynamic movement of the sand dunes over relatively short periods of time, something which was not anticipated prior to the commencement of the excavations.

Building 2 is aligned north to south, with the most prominent feature being the doorway formed by the two upright trapezoidal blocks of local green sandstone (201). The doorway also had a vertical threshold stone and internal step made of thinner stone slabs. The doorway was set within a stone wall which projected to the north (200) and south (205). Two further walls aligned east to west projected from the face of the sand dune to the south of the doorway (walls 203 and 204). With the assumption they formed part of the same structure the total building length was around 15.4m north to south.

At the base of the sand dune areas of stone were revealed piled on top of and within the archaeological surface. These were a mix of more recent deposition and original medieval material. All stone layers were recorded through written descriptions, measured drawings and photography to ensure that no archaeological material was missed.

The doorway and western wall of the building were cleared of tidal borne material. This revealed that the wall foundations exposed in 2010, had since been significantly eroded so that only a few of the stones to the south of the doorway still survived. A depth of clay material (215) was present behind the stone wall within the structure. To the north of the doorway the wall was exposed for a length of 1m and this had survived in a far better state of preservation than that to the south.



Photo 2: Excavation of Building 2, showing wall (200) to left, with doorway (201) and wall (205) to right



Photo 3: Fully uncovered doorway to Building 2 (201)

Clearance of the doorway showed that the vertical threshold stone measured a maximum height of 0.32m and 0.83m in width. The upright stones on either side of the doorway were of maximums of 0.72m height, 0.32m width and 0.40m depth to the north and 0.84m height, 0.45m width and 0.5m depth to the south (Photo 3). A horizontal stone step was present above the threshold (246). The



ground then rose again to a second step (247) constructed of thin trapezoidal pieces of sandstone, of maximum length of 0.60m, of which four were present in 2010, but only two had survived into 2011. These were surrounded by smaller flat stones creating a roughly square paved area of 1.2m x 1.2m (248) (Photo 4).

To the north and south of this paved area, no corresponding stone surfaces were visible. To both sides a layer of sand and clay was exposed. Further layers beneath became progressively more clay rich at depth. Medieval pottery was recovered from these layers. It is presumed that they are the remains of beaten earth floors associated with the use of the building. Over time these have become waterlogged to such an extent that individual floor layers could not be discerned. Waterlogging had occurred due to these probable floor layers lying at the interface between the free draining sands above and the mostly impervious natural clay soils beneath.



Photo 4: Paved area inside Building 2 (248) to east of entrance

The depth of clay material (215) seen on the inside of the western wall to the south of the entrance was separated from the floor levels by a north to south aligned kerb of vertical stone slabs (214) (Photo 5). This arrangement was not present to the north of the doorway. These slabs were on average 0.30m in depth and varied in size between 0.20m to 0.40m in length and no more than 0.04m in width. The clay layer and stone kerbing was separated from the doorway by a larger vertically placed slab at its northern end. The kerb ran for 4m to the south before either stopping or having been previously eroded away.

The clay material enclosed by the kerb and western wall was a maximum width of 0.70m, and was slightly bowed outwards in the centre of its length. It was formed by two layers, (214) on the top and the darker clay layer (251) below. Medieval pottery was recovered from the small sections excavated through the clay layers. This kerbed clay material sat directly upon the underlying natural clay soils and had the effect of pooling water draining through the dunes inside the building, making further excavation impossible. The function of this kerbed

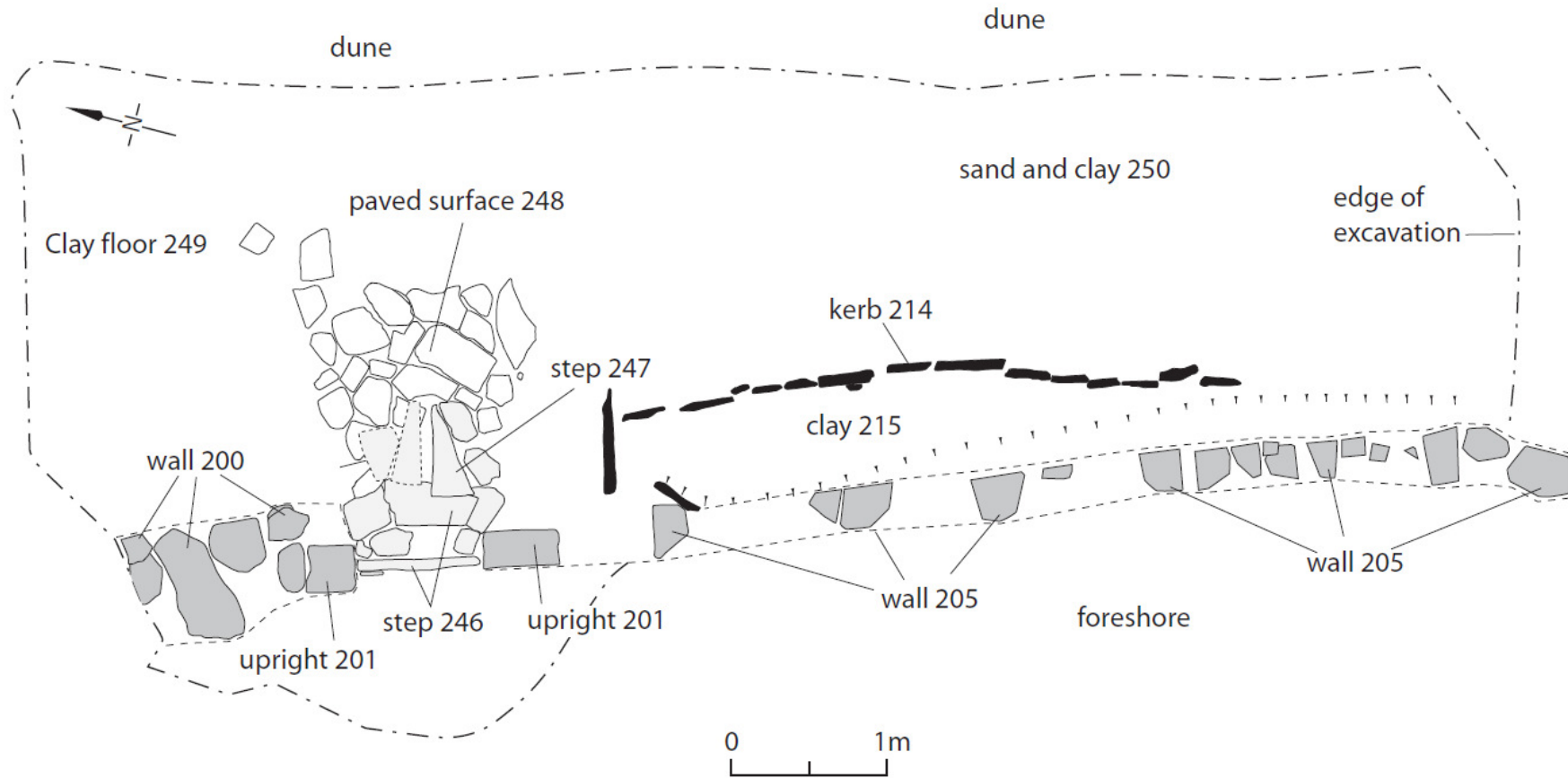
clay material against the inside wall of the building is unknown and further research will be needed for comparative examples.

In total the main excavation area measured some 11m in length from north to south and 3.5m in width into the sand dune (Figure 3). The two east to west aligned walls recorded during the 2010 investigation which were considered to be part of Building 2 lay to the south of the excavation area.



Photo 5: Clay Layer (215) to left and stone kerb (214)





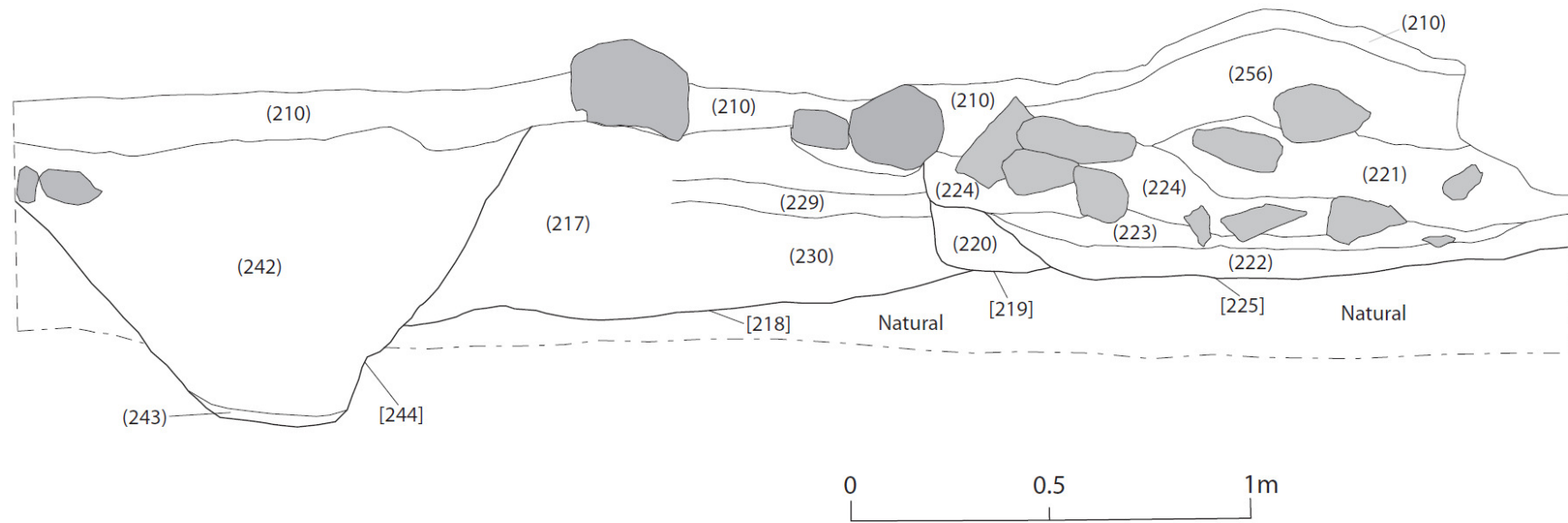
**Figure 3:** Main excavation area over Building 2

The face of the eroding dune and underlying clays was cleaned between the excavation area and the two walls to the south (walls 202 & 203) to determine if they were part of the same structure. The evidence indicates that they are probably separate. The cleaned face of the dune revealed a number of buried archaeological features, including a flat based pit or possible beam slot cut [219], a pit cut [225] and a ditch cut [244] (Photo 6; Figure 4).

The presence of a ditch cut [244] between the building and the walls to the south would suggest that they are separate features, although they could be associated with different phases of occupation at the site. It was not possible to confirm this within the limits of the excavation. Covering all of the buried features outside of the building footprint was a depth of darker soil (217/230) lying directly below the sand dune material which is considered to represent a buried topsoil or ground surface. A number of lenses were noted in this soil including shell layers (229) and organic rich areas, but due to the limitations of the excavation it was not possible to determine if they were separate features. Medieval pottery was recovered from a number of these features.



Photo 6: Part of face of dune investigated to south of excavation area showing a number of archaeological features



**Figure 4:** Section to south of Building 2 showing possible boundary ditch [244], beam slot [219] and pit [225]



A second area of the face of the sand dune was recorded in the area further to the south of the two walls. This also demonstrated the presence of a number of archaeological features, including a probable ditch or gully cut [238] (Photo 7) and a flat based and vertical sided gully, which could be a structural beam slot cut [240] (Photo 8). Medieval pottery was also recovered from a number of these features.



Photo 7: Area of possible ditch [238] below stones



Photo 8: Partially excavated possible beam slot [240] to left of stones



## DISCUSSION

Overall the excavation has provided a considerably amount of information regarding the abandoned settlement at St Ishmael. Building 2 has been shown to have an entrance accessing the building from the west, with steps leading up into the structure. The walls were made of stone and a stone flagged floor was present within the entranceway. To the north and south the floors of the building were probably of beaten earth. These beaten earth floors and the stepped entrance would suggest it was for human habitation as opposed to housing animals.

Although erosion has removed the majority of the western wall (205), those foundation stones that remained and the construction of the entrance indicate it was a well made building. The surviving walls seen within Building 1 to the north were also substantial, surviving to a height of 0.5m in places again indicating substantially made structures. This may indicate that the settlement was quite wealthy or of higher status.

Archaeological evidence from the exposed face of the sand dunes suggests the presence of further postholes and possible flat based beam slots for timber buildings. Whether these are additional and contemporary structures to the exposed stone buildings or an earlier phase of settlement is unclear. Yard areas were also noted between the structures. It is presumed that the settlement utilised the resources of both the marine and land environments, and doubtless arable and pastoral farming was practiced at the settlement in the fertile land which lies to the east.

The majority of finds made at the site, both in recent years and during investigations in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, with some possible 16<sup>th</sup> century material also present. The pottery recovered from the site in 2011 comprised 29 sherds, all of medieval date. The pottery can be dated from the late 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century with one later exception. However, all of this main phase of pottery usage could lie within the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A single sherd from a Malvernian skilket from (220) can be dated to the late 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century. The pottery comprises a wide range of fabrics, many of them imports from English sources shipped by the Severn coasting trade. South-west Welsh produced pottery is in the minority, but this is typical of many coastal sites in south-west Wales. The radiocarbon date obtained from the hearth within Building 1 gives the highest probability of it being last used between Cal AD 1430 and Cal AD 1530.

The evidence gathered from Building 2 indicates that the beaten earth floors of the building were directly covered in sand, and the floors themselves did not appear to have been washed away, as would be expected with a 'tsunami' style event. This is also highlighted by the survival of charcoal residues from the apparent last use of the hearth within Building 1. The survival of walls to heights of 0.5m also contradicts a theory of tidal devastation. It is suggested that due to gradual erosion of the land upon the scars projecting into Carmarthen Bay and movement of river channels, the settlement became subject to episodes of be-sandment. Sand bars may have formed in front of the settlement restricting access to the sea or fish traps. Over time the population moved away from the settlement as it became increasingly difficult to live there.

The settlement is not clearly recorded in documentary sources, which is considered unusual given the substantial nature of the buildings within the site. It is possible that documentary sources held by the Duchy Of Lancaster for this region covering the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries may contain further details, but these have yet to be explored. Abandonment of the settlement is not recorded, which is also unusual. If the settlement had been devastated by a 'tsunami' style event, then the resultant loss of life and property would surely have been documented.

Even with a gradual abandonment of the settlement, as is suggested by the evidence from the investigations, with possessions being removed (only small fragments of pottery, presumably thrown out with the rubbish were recovered), the loss of structures and land would have been important information to record.

It was noted during the two phases of investigation that large quantities of green sandstone blocks, including a number of trapezoidal shaped blocks similar to those used in the doorway to Building 2, were present on the beach. The presence of this stone started at the northern end of Building 1 and ran south to just beyond the location of Building 4. This is thought to provide further evidence for the extent of the settlement from north to south.

Comparison of the location of the remains of the walls and buildings shown on the photographs and illustrations prepared by RCAHMS in 1912 and those that are present today indicates that a substantial amount of erosion has taken place in the last century. The fact that the sea defences were added after 1917, and that the edge of the dunes lies around 5m east of this today also demonstrates the general rate of erosion, especially with the assumption that the sea defences did work successfully for a number of years. It is estimated that the remains seen by RCAHMS in 1912 were at least 8m to the west of those that presently exist.

Buildings 1 and 2 both indicate that the structures were laid out on very similar north to south alignment. This may also be the case with Building 3 if the interpretation is correct. This may imply a roadway was present running north to south along the western sides of these buildings, from which the doorway of Building 2 gave access. Those seen in 1912 suggest an entirely different range of structures on the opposite side of the roadway which have long since been eroded. With a possible four buildings still present today, and a number of others recorded previously, it is suggested that at least 8 substantial stone buildings were present within the settlement, with additional yard areas and timber structures. Assuming this theory is correct and that the buildings were contemporary, as indicated by their very similar styles of construction and positioning, could this suggest a planned settlement layout? The size and style of construction of the stone buildings is quite different to contemporary buildings in other parts of the region. Could this therefore indicate the settlement was built by non-native migrants? With the proximity of the Norman and Flemish castles at Kidwelly, Llansteffan and Laugharne (the last two visible from the site), it is suggested that the St Ishmael settlement was of Norman origin, perhaps replacing or adding to an existing native Welsh settlement around the Church of St Ishmael. When the site was abandoned, it is possible that the population moved inland to Llansaint, another settlement established by the Normans.

## **CONCLUSION**

The site is still constantly eroding, if not through tidal action, from rain water washing through the sand dunes. It is known that our recent two archaeological investigations have speeded up erosion of some areas, but this has been mitigated through the archaeological recording undertaken of those same remains. Monitoring of the site in recent years by Owen Harris would suggest that the base of the dunes is eroding at an average rate of around 0.15 to 0.30m a year, although in some places it is noted as being far quicker. Without monitoring the site and further recording of exposed deposits following high spring tides and poor weather, the site will be lost to the sea.

The quality and quantity of the information gained from the two phases of recent archaeological investigation at the St Ishmael site is very much a result of the hard work and commitment of the many volunteers who have assisted with the project. The author would like to give his thanks to all those who have taken part.

## **Further Work**

A full technical report will need to be produced on the results. This will include analysis of all finds recovered by Owen Harris over the last few years; analysis and incorporation of DAT data recovered during investigations in 1996; full analysis of the results of the 2010 and 2011 investigations; further documentary analysis; further radiocarbon dates if suitable material has been recovered; analysis of environmental samples; production of a publication report for submission to Archaeology in Wales or similar.

Further monitoring of the site will be necessary, and has been undertaken since the excavation finished. It is likely that every now and then larger areas of significant remains will become exposed and thus under greater threat from erosion and more detailed schemes of recording may need to be implemented. At some point in the not too distant future, coastal defences will need to be erected to protect the West Wales Line Railway. Any such works could impact upon the archaeological remains and it must be ensured that appropriate archaeological mitigation can be carried out in advance of this.

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# ARFORDIR COASTAL HERITAGE 2011 – 2012

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2012/25  
RHIF Y DIGWYDDIAD / EVENT RECORD NO. 102764

Mawrth 2012  
March 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE  
BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by

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Swydd / Position: Head Of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature .....  ..... Date 30/03/2012

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith  
This report has been checked and approved by

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Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature .....  ..... Date 30/03/2012

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

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