

# EAST BLOCKHOUSE, ANGLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION JULY 2011



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust  
For Cadw and the Pembrokeshire Coast  
National Park Authority



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# DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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## EAST BLOCKHOUSE, ANGLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION JULY 2011

Gan / By  
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**EAST BLOCKHOUSE, ANGLE, PEMBROKESHIRE:  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

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**EAST BLOCKHOUSE, ANGLE, PEMBROKESHIRE:  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

**SUMMARY**

*Defensive structures of 16<sup>th</sup> century date are rare in Britain, and thus the unfinished remains of East Blockhouse at Angle are of considerable importance. The Blockhouse is in very poor condition, and active coastal erosion is undermining it. Therefore a small excavation was undertaken during the summer of 2011 to record the surviving archaeology before it slips into the sea.*

*The excavation demonstrated that rubble and floor deposits were removed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, probably during the Second World War, and little which could aid dating the structure or characterising how it functioned has survived.*

*A small concrete plinth for a shed and a hollow outside the Blockhouse, probably a machine gun position, were direct evidence for its use during the Second World War*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 16<sup>th</sup> century East Blockhouse at Angle is in a perilous location, and much of it has already fallen into the sea. Monitoring of its condition over many years has recorded a slow deterioration of the structure, but during the winter of 2010-11 a large landslip undermined parts of the surviving walls. It is likely that any further landslips would render the site unsafe, and therefore it was decided to excavate the Blockhouse whilst it was still accessible. With this aim in mind an application was made to Cadw for grant-aid to excavate and record the Blockhouse during the summer of 2011. This application was successful, and grant-aid from Cadw was supplemented by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park making time available for their archaeologist (P Crane) to direct the excavation.

East Blockhouse is located on a coastal promontory at the western tip of Angle Parish in Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 8411 0278), on the eastern side of the entrance to Milford Haven waterway (Fig. 1; Photos. 1-3). It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (PE398), and recorded as site 3061 on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record.

Sixteenth century defensive structures are rare, with the only others known in Britain on the Thames and at Fowey in Cornwall. The example at Angle is the only surviving one in Wales.

The objective of the project was to excavate and record what remains of the interior of the Blockhouse in order to assist in understanding the chronology and function of the monument.

## **HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY**

During the reign of Henry VIII there was a threat of a Spanish and French invasion of Britain. In response to this threat, vulnerable coasts were defended (Saunders 1989, 37). The need to defend Milford Haven was recognised in 1539 (Colvin *et al* 1982, 482) and construction soon started on a pair of blockhouses at the mouth of the Milford Haven waterway: Angle (East Blockhouse) and Dale (West Blockhouse). However, it would seem that they were not finished, for in 1546 it was recorded that they were never made up to the first floor and part of them had already fallen over.

Under the renewed threat of invasion in 1589 permission was granted to use materials from the unfinished Henrician blockhouses, but no work was done (*ibid.* 483). Dale Blockhouse was erased by the construction of a 19<sup>th</sup> century gun fort, but Angle Blockhouse continued its slow decay, apart from limited reuse during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Angle Blockhouse occupies the edge of a narrow promontory at c.35m above sea level, connected to higher ground to the east by a shallow saddle (Fig. 2). The western end of the Blockhouse has fallen into the sea, and what remains is in danger of falling away to the west and south (Photo. 3). The standing remains have been previously recorded (Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust 1993) when three phases of building were noted, the first two probably of 16<sup>th</sup> century date and the third dating to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Three courses of wall foundation similar in character to those of the Blockhouse lie c.15m to the southeast on the cliff edge; they were photographically recorded, but not investigated further owing to their precarious location. A c.3m diameter hollow probably of 20<sup>th</sup> century date lies immediately to the east of the Blockhouse, and a slight earthwork bank some 35m to the east may have had an association with the structure.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The site was excavated over two weeks in late July 2012. Turf and topsoil was removed by hand in the interior of the surviving building (Trench 1), over half of the hollow immediately outside the building (Trench 2) and over an L-shaped trench (Trench 3) across the slight earthwork 35m east of the Blockhouse. All archaeological features and deposits were then hand excavated and recorded in accordance with Dyfed Archaeological Trust's recording manual. A photographic record was also made of the standing buildings (Photos. 13-20). Following excavation the trenches were back-filled and re-turfed (Photo. 11).

The excavations were undertaken by three members of Dyfed Archaeological Trust staff and ten local volunteers.

## **EXCAVATION RESULTS**

### **Interior of Blockhouse (Trench 1)**

The whole of the surviving room within the Blockhouse was examined in Trench 1 (Fig. 3; Photos. 4-7). The partially surviving room to the west was not examined due to safety considerations. Removal of turf and a thin (150mm) stony soil (202) revealed shattered bedrock. A few sherds of 20<sup>th</sup> century ceramics, oyster shell and bone were found in layer 202. There was no rubble or stone from the dilapidated walls and there were no surviving floor surfaces. Patches of mortar lay on the surface of the bedrock, and a slate hearth-stone was revealed in the east wall at its northern end. A concrete plinth occupied the northwest corner of the interior, constructed over layer 202 (Fig. 4; Photo 7). A shallow trench (209), filled with a silty soil, stones and mortar lumps, lay parallel to the north wall.

It would seem that the whole of the interior of the Blockhouse was cleared out during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (probably during the Second World War) removing rubble and floor deposits. The concrete plinth was almost certainly for a small shed constructed during the Second World War. The shallow trench (209) is probably a foundation trench dating to the original 16<sup>th</sup> century construction of the Blockhouse.

### **The Hollow (Trench 2)**

The hollow (203) was half-sectioned (Fig. 5; Photos. 8-9). It was filled by layers of sandy-clay soil one of which contained a .22 calibre bullet case, and included a discrete sand deposit within the fill. A thin layer of clay lined the bottom of the hollow.

This hollow is most likely to have been a Second World War machine gun position, with the sand deposit the decayed remains of one of the sand-bags that surrounded the hollow.

### **Earthwork (Trench 3)**

Bedrock was revealed along the length of this trench following removal of turf and topsoil (Photo. 10). The slight earthwork visible on the surface is therefore considered to be entirely natural.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that site is monitored a least once a year and that any remains revealed by erosion and landslips are recorded.

## **ARTEFACTS**

A number of oyster shells, animal bone, mortar fragments, 20<sup>th</sup> century ceramic sherds and a .22 calibre bullet were found during the excavation. These were not retained.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Dyfed Archaeological Trust and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park would like to thank Simon and Jenny Robson, owners of the Blockhouse, for permission to excavate and for their help and assistance during the excavation. The excavations were directed by Pete Crane, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Archaeologist, and assisted by Simon Ratty and Hubert Wilson of Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Ken Murphy of Dyfed Archaeological Trust compiled this report. Many thanks are due to the volunteers who generously devoted their time to the excavation.

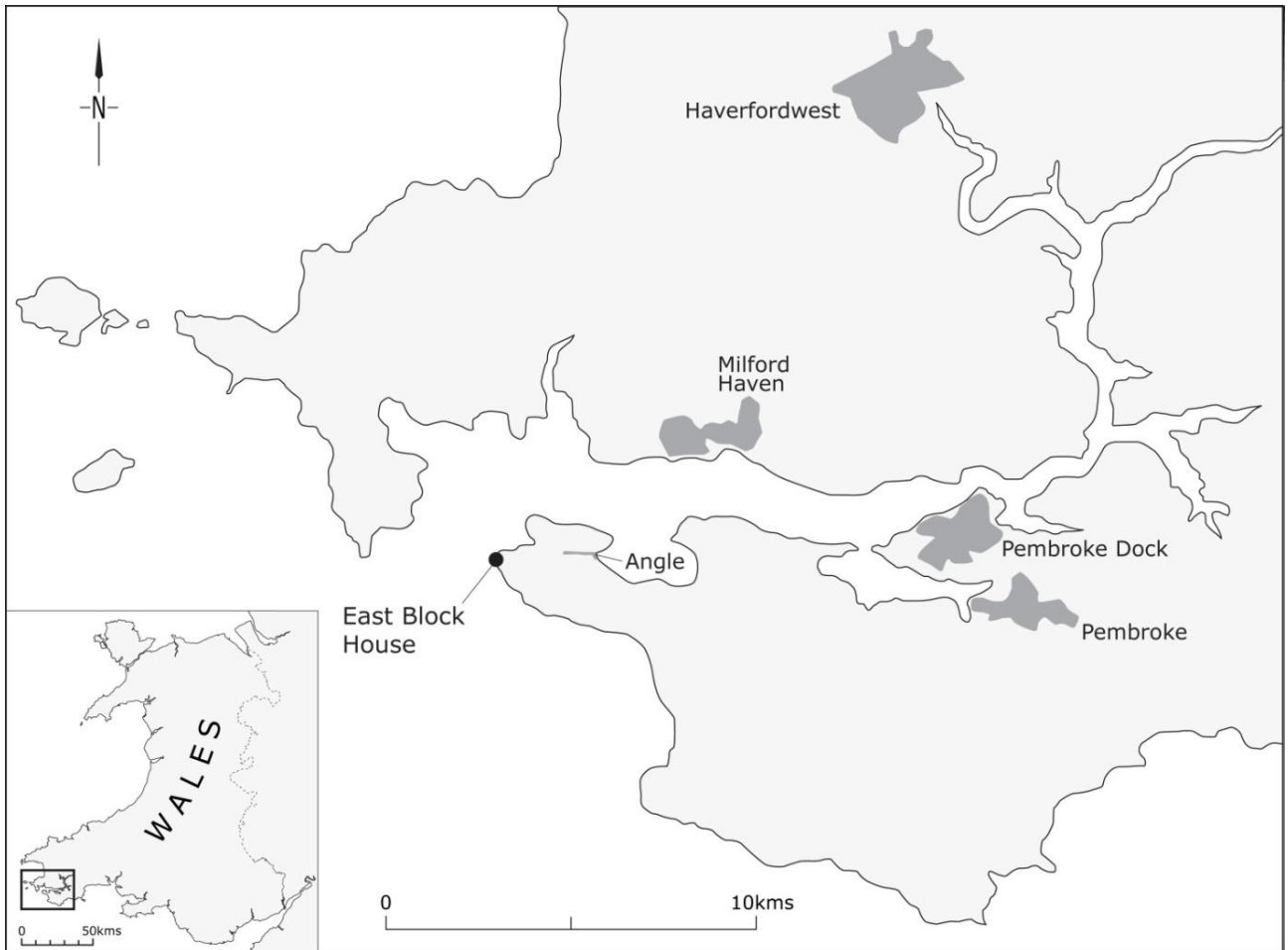
## **SOURCES**

Colvin H M, Summerson J, Biddle M, Robe J R and Merriman M (eds) 1982. *History of the King's Works 4: 1485-1660*, part 2, London: HMSO.

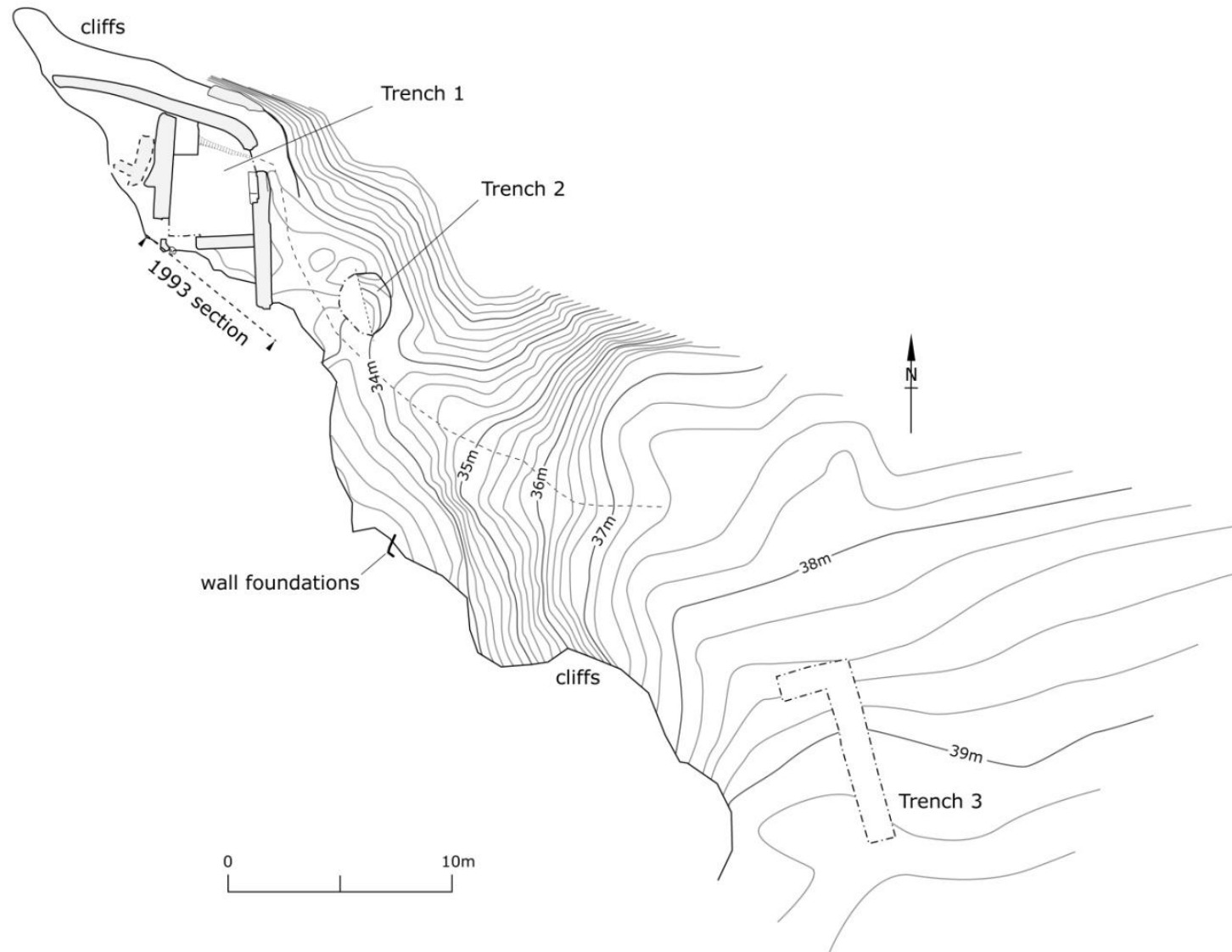
Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Contracts Section, 1993. 'Archaeological Recording East Blockhouse, Angle, Dyfed November 1993', unpublished Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust report.

Saunders A D, 1989. *Fortress Britain: artillery fortifications in the British Isles and Ireland*, Liphook, Hants: Beaufort Press.

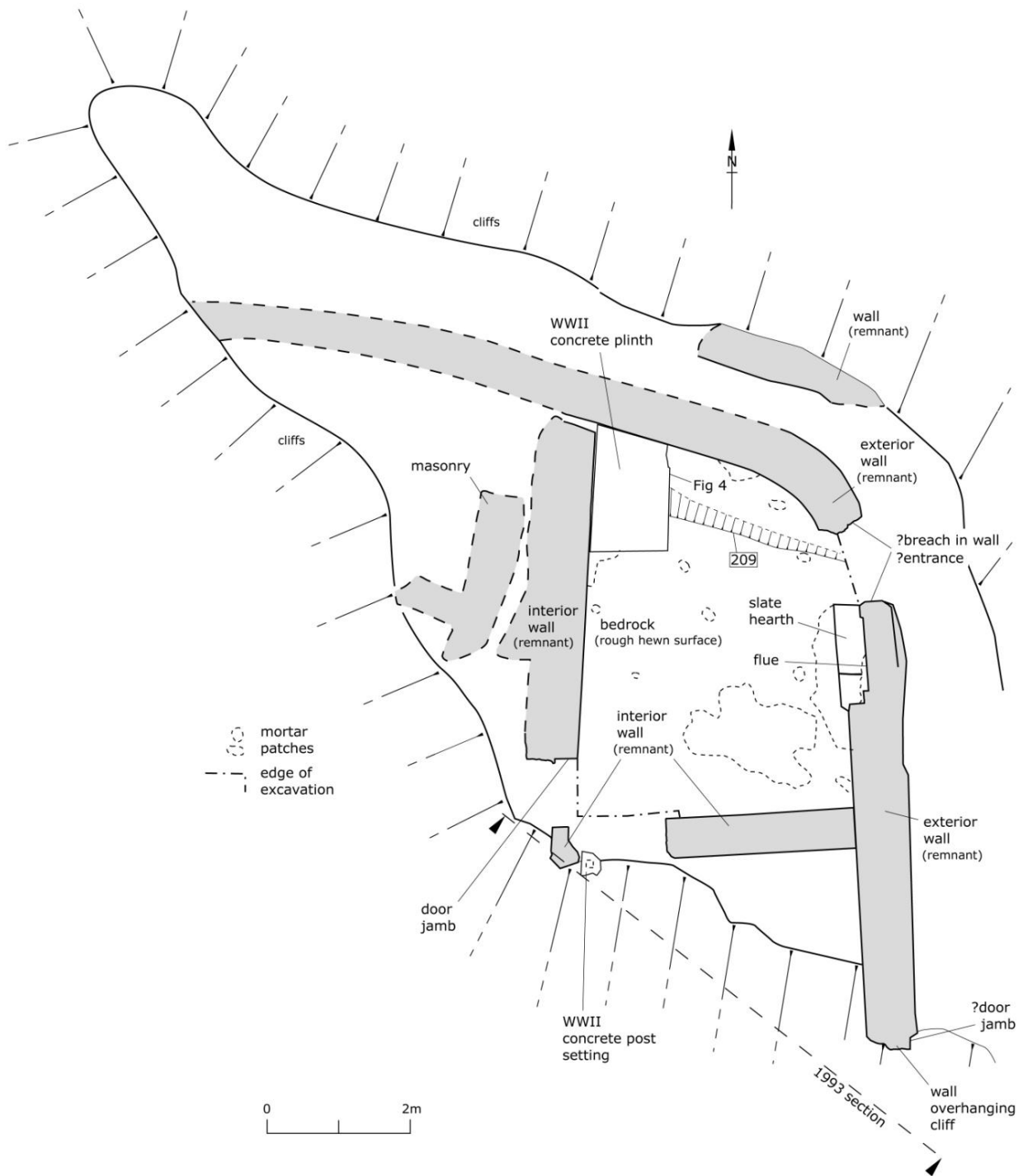
**FIGURES**



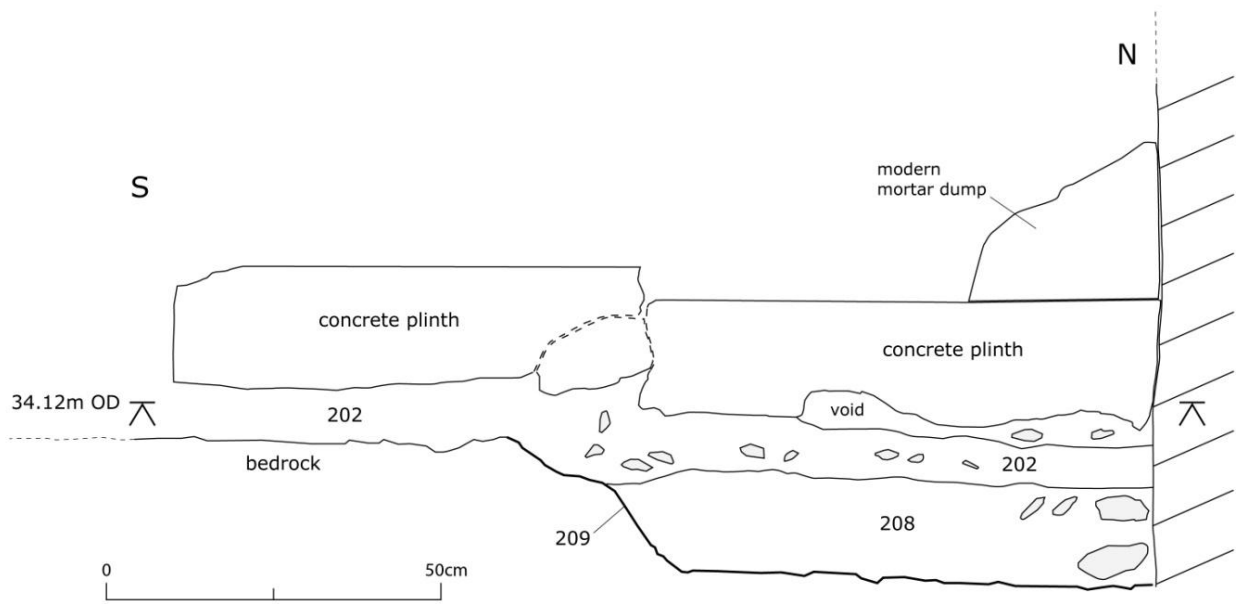
**Figure 1:** Location map.



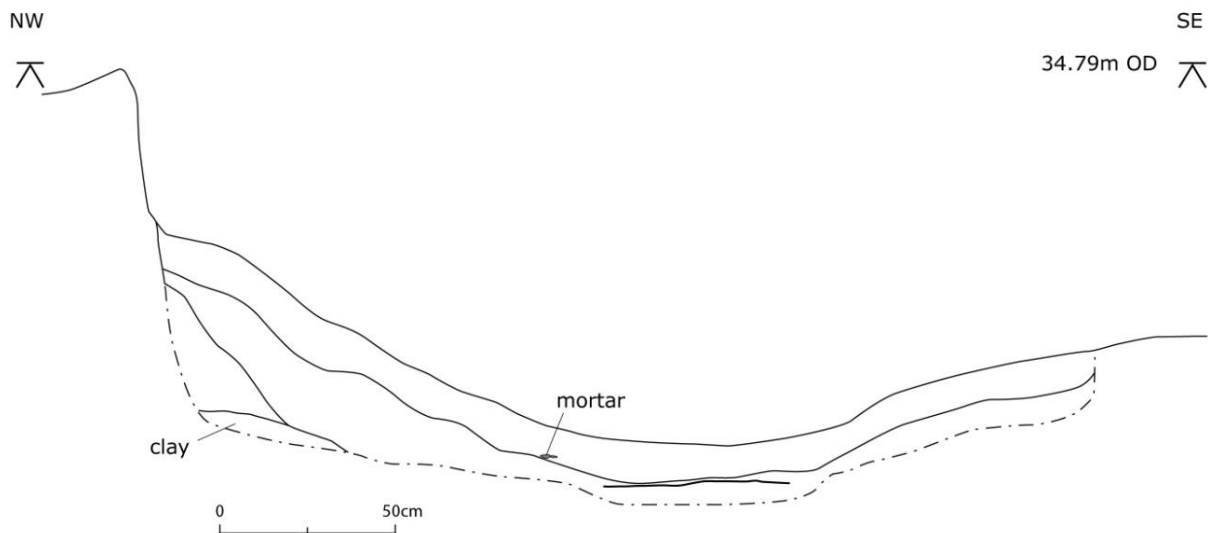
**Figure 2:** Location of East Blockhouse and of the excavation trenches. Heights in metres O.D.



**Figure 3:** Plan of the East Blockhouse, Trench 1.



**Figure 4:** Section of the part of Trench 1 inside the Blockhouse.



**Figure 5:** Section of the hollow, Trench 2.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Photograph 1. The Blockhouse from the east prior to excavation.



Photograph 2. The general location of the Blockhouse seen from the south-east.



Photograph 3. The undercut east wall at the south end.



Photograph 4. The early stages of removing turf and topsoil from inside the Blockhouse



Photograph 5. The interior of the Blockhouse after removal of turf and topsoil. Scale 1m.



Photograph 6. The interior of the Blockhouse after removal of turf and topsoil showing the slate hearth stone in the east wall, north end. Scales 1m.





Photograph 7. The interior of the Blockhouse after removal of turf and topsoil showing the concrete plinth in the north-west corner and the foundation trench. Scales 1m.



Photograph 8. Excavating the hollow (Trench 2) to the east of the Blockhouse.



Photograph 9. Section of the hollow (Trench 2). Scale 0.5m.





Photograph 10. Trench 3.  
1m scale



Photograph 11. The re-  
turfed interior of the  
Blockhouse



Photograph 12. The  
wall on the cliff edge 15m to  
the southeast of the  
Blockhouse. 0.5m scale



Photographs 13 – 15 General building recording photographs.

Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photographs 16 – 18.  
General building recording  
photographs.



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18

Photographs 19 - 20.  
General building recording  
photographs.



Photo 19



Photo 20

**RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NUMBER 2011/33**

**Mawrth 2012  
March 2012**

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

Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature



Dyddiad / Date 23 March 2012

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

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.  
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date 23 March 2012

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



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