

EXCAVATIONS AT CWM NASH, MONKNASH, SOUTH GLAMORGAN, 1993

By Martin Locock

with contributions by S Greep and Dr J L Wilkinson

Figures

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Figure 1 | Location map, showing excavation and other sites mentioned in the text |
| Figure 2 | Earthwork survey and excavation of Cwm Nash |
| Figure 3 | Excavated features: the burials |
| Figure 4 | Excavated features: reburied skull |
| Figure 5 | Finds: shale bracelet |

Introduction

Cwm Nash lies on the north coast of the Severn estuary, 8km southeast of Porthcawl, in the parish of Monknash, South Glamorgan (SS 905 701: fig. 1). The rolling hills of the Western Vale of Glamorgan are Liassic Limestone, cut by steep-sided valleys caused by solifluxion. The Nash Brook runs west from Monknash; for the western 1km of its course, it drops into the deep valley of Cwm Nash. At its west end, the valley has been filled by a series of tufa deposits to a depth of 5m (Evans *et al.* 1978, 68). At the outlet, the tufa forms a flat narrow shelf to the north of the stream, on which the present site is located. The tufa is covered by a build-up of hillwash.

In 1982, a human long-bone was washed out of the cliff. In 1990, GGAT was contacted by the owner of Blaen-y-cwm, Monknash, reporting the exposure of human bones by marine erosion: a site visit recovered part of a skull (Wardle 1991). In 1993, the landowner reported that further exposure had occurred, and requesting that archaeological work be undertaken before the site's destruction. An application for funding was made to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, and following their approval, the excavations were undertaken in February 1993. This is a summary of an unpublished report to Cadw (GGAT report 93/068), copies of which can be obtained from GGAT, Swansea.

The excavations

The tufa shelf is a well-defined topographic area, on which a series of artificial features are visible (fig. 2). Of most interest is a small circular feature, 5m diameter, perhaps a building. A scar runs down from the south of this feature, dropping to the west, with possible spoil-dumps on the north edge. The scar presumably dropped to the beach level, but has

now been eroded away. A similar feature, further to the south, is the modern path from Blaen-y-Cwm's access to the beach.

A single excavation area was opened on the cliff-edge, to include the three graves visible in the section. The tufa (003) was covered by a spread of hillwash (002), into which the graves were cut (fig. 3). The hillwash surface was littered by stones, the closest natural source of which was a scree deposit on the north edge of the tufa shelf.

The three graves did not inter-cut, and are apparently broadly contemporary (fig. 3). The west ends of all the graves had been removed by marine erosion of the cliff-edge.

The north grave cut (004) contained skeleton 011, complete from the chest down. The body was arranged in an extended position, with the right hand resting above the right side of the pelvis. The grave fill 010 contained numerous shells but few stones.

The central grave cut (005) contained skeleton 013, complete from the chest down. The body was arranged in an extended position, with the hands alongside the pelvis. The grave fill 009 contained numerous disarticulated bones from at least two further skeletons. In the upper fill, a large stone marked the east end of the grave, and just to the west was buried an articulated skull and mandible, arranged in a nest of disarticulated bone (008). Three types of treatment of bone are represented: careful burial of the main body (013); careful burial of the skull and associated bones at the foot of the grave in the upper fill (008), and casual disposal of other bone in the lower fill.

The south grave cut (006) contained skeleton 012, complete from the mandible down. The body was arranged in an extended position, with the hands alongside the pelvis. The left femur of this skeleton was submitted for radiocarbon dating. A shroud pin was found close to the left femur. The grave fill 007 contained few stones.

The graves were covered by the well-developed soil 001 underlying the present turf. This soil development obscured the upper parts of the grave fills.

A group of bones which had fallen from the cliff was recovered from the beach (014).

The arrangements of the graves and skeletons suggests that they are Christian burials, in shrouds or winding sheets, and that the burials respect each other. The foot of one grave was marked by a stone.

It seems that at the time of the burials, numbers of other human bones required burial, which were treated with varying degrees of

repect, from careful reburial of the skull and other bones at the foot of 008, to more casual disposal in back-fill of the graves.

The finds

Human bone

The large assemblage of human bone was studied by Dr J L Wilkinson: a full catalogue will be found in Locock 1993, 7-22. In addition to the three articulated skeletons (Individuals 1-3), remains of a further nine individuals were present.

Individual	Context	Description
1	011	male, 16-17, 1.74m, very robust, thick-set individual, femoral hypotrochanteric fossae
2	012	male, 24-26, 1.70m, robust, Schmorl's nodes
3	013	male, 30, 1.65m, moderately robust, probably engaged in manual labour, Schmorl's nodes
4	008	male, 22-23, mesocephalic, Wormian bones, persistent metopic suture, dental caries, healed dental abscess, periodontal disease, rough diet
5	008	male, 18-20, refined diet
6	009	male, 18-20, 1.73m (may = Ind. 5, 10)
7	009	male, 25-30, 1.69m, old dental abscess in maxilla
8	009	50+, Paget's disease
9	009	below 18 (may = Ind. 1)
10	014	18-20, refined diet (may = Ind. 5, 6)
11	014	40+, ? 1.68m, early costovertebral arthritis
12	014	(may = Ind. 8)
13	various	male, 17-19 (may = Ind. 1,5,6,9 or 10)
14	various	male, mature adult

Table One: Summary of Individuals Represented at Cwm Nash

The population represented is apparently largely male, with a preponderance of young individuals (surprising in a burial assemblage); it would better suit a monastic than a secular origin.

The radiocarbon date

A femur from skeleton 012 was submitted for analysis to Dr Q Dresser, University College Cardiff as part of the Cadw Radiocarbon contract for 1993/4. The extracted collagen (sample CAR-1477) yielded a determination of 170 +/- 60 bp uncalibrated,

indicating a post-medieval date. Calibration yields a 2 standard deviation range of AD 1510-1530 or 1620-1850 (Pearson et al. 1988, fig. 1).

Shale bracelet by Stephen Greep (fig. 5)

A plain shale bracelet of oval section was recovered from context 002. The type is hard to date: there are Iron Age examples from Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, fig. 107:10), and numerous Roman examples from south Wales and elsewhere (Zienkiewicz 1986, fig. 77:4; Lawson 1975, fig. 4). The proximity of the villa site at New Mill Farm (Dowdell 1976) may explain the recovery of this find from a residual context.

Other finds

Other finds were examined by S H Sell, J Compton and M Locock. Context 013 contained a sherd of North Devon gravel-tempered ware, dating between 1650-1850, and probably from the earlier part of the range. Context 009 contained a clay pipe stem of 17th-18th century type. Context 007 contained a copper alloy pin, 13mm long, with a round head, identified as a possible shroud pin.

Historical background

The area was part of land granted to Neath Abbey following the conquest of the Lordship of Ogmor by Robert Fitzhamon in the late 11th century (GCH 1980, 286). There was a church there already (Williams 1984, 237); Rice Merrick's account of Sir Richard de Granvilla describes how in 1129 he granted to Neath abbey lands including "the ffee of Moonke Nash, with the Church thereto belonging, and certaine lands neere unto Nash, within the ffee of Oggmor" (1887 ed., 70). The church presumably had been the parish church, but when granted to the monks, parochial burial and baptism rights were extinguished (Neath Abbey being used instead), and the building became a chapel (Green 1906, 75-77; Thomas in litt.). Medieval features associated with Monknash Grange included a holy well at Ffynnon Mair (Mary's spring) (Williams 1984, 179-180).

Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Monknash estate was rapidly broken up, and was divided into 16 holdings within months (Williams 1984, 104). In 1542, the grange and chapel were granted to Sir Richard Williams alias Cromwell and sold to Thomas Stradling (RCAHMW 1982, 262); the village of Monknash grew to house the secular farmers. The parish of Monknash was one of the parishes created out of land which had previously been extraparochial because held by the Cistercians (GCH 1980, 118), and St Mary's Monknash became a parochial church again. It was not until 1607, though, that the Bishop of Llandaff granted a

licence for burial within a newly marked-out graveyard enclosure adjoining the church (Green 1906, 76).

Old grange sites sometimes retained burial grounds: Llanfair Gilgoed grange (Gwent) continued to be used for recusant burials until the late 18th century (Williams 1984, 236).

Religious sites in Monknash parish

Four sites have been suggested as possible religious centres in Monknash parish (fig 1).

St Mary's Monknash

The present parish church, on the Llantwit road 100m south of the grange, retains 12th-century features (GCH 1980, 385), although it was restored in the mid 19th century. The church is shown on Yates's map of 1799. There is no reason to doubt that this building is the medieval chapel mentioned in the documents. From 1542 it was a parochial church; from 1607 it had burial and baptism rights.

Monknash Grange chapel

There is no evidence for a chapel within the grange (RCAHMW 1982); views of "chapel ruins" from the 19th century may just be parts of the grange (Williams 1984, 237).

Possible site of church

The visible remains of a structure lie at SS 911 697, in fields 500m to the south of Blaen-y-Cwm; the site is identified on Ordnance Survey maps from 1911 onwards as a "Site of church", and is shown as such of Rees's map of medieval south Wales (1933). Recent fieldwork has rejected this identification, and on the basis of the layout of the site and recovered finds, it is now considered to be a Roman villa (Dowdell 1976; Goodburn et al. 1978, 409).

Ffynnon Mair holy spring

The spring in Cwm Nash, 50m east of the site, is shown on Ordnance Survey maps as Ffynnon Mair. It is likely that this name is of medieval origin, when the area was part of the land of the grange. The Cistercian order was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and it is common for monastic houses and granges to have such sites nearby (Williams 1984, 179-180).

Because of Monknash's exemption from tithes as part of land belonging to the Cistercians, the ecclesiastical administration did not follow the normal parochial pattern following the grant of the estate. It seems that St Mary's Monknash served the

settlement and grange as a chapel-of-ease for the main church at Neath Abbey, its parochial status having been extinguished. Since the church lies outside the grange, it seems unlikely that it was newly built by the monks, and so presumably overlies the pre-Norman church. The antiquity of the tradition of sanctity of Ffynnon Mair in Blaen-y-Cwm is unknown, but its association with Mary suggests that it is at least as old as the grange. Thus there are likely to have been two centres of religious activity in medieval Monkash, both under the control of the monks of the grange, and both without burial rights.

Following the Dissolution, the church was restored to parochial status, but still did not have burial and baptism rights. Clearly, though, the parishioners must have been buried somewhere. Although it would normally be expected that the burial ground would be attached to the main church of a settlement, there are numerous instances of detached and duplicate graveyards. It seems that Cwm Nash was an unofficial burial ground used by the parishioners at a time when there was no licensed ground; it is possible that this was a continuation of a late medieval tradition which grew up because of the presence of the holy spring and the inconvenience of burial at Neath.

What dating evidence there is suggests that the excavated burials are mid 17th century in date, later than the granting of the licence for burials at St Mary's Monkash. This may reflect the continued use of the Cwm Nash burial ground as an alternative by some people, either for religious reasons (recusants, for example, as noted at other grange sites) or from family sentiment.

Conclusion

The excavated skeletons are best explained as a series of post-medieval burials near the medieval holy spring of Ffynnon Mair, used as an unlicensed burial ground by the parishioners of Monkash between 1542-1607. It is possible that, following the granting of a licence for burial at St Mary's Monkash in 1607, the Cwm Nash burial place continued to be preferred by recusants because of its association with the well and grange, while more Puritan individuals used the churchyard at St Mary's Monkash. It is less likely that the burials are those of Nonconformists for the same reason, although their use of a separate burial ground would have been legal (Gittings 1984, 56).

It is possible that the post-medieval burials are the result of continued use of a late medieval burial ground now partially lost to the sea. If so, then human bones would have been washed out of the cliff as it eroded, perhaps to be re-interred in fresh graves. This would explain the preponderance of males in the population as the medieval staff of Monkash Grange.

The test of these hypotheses would be a further examination of the site, paying particular attention to the possible structure, and monitoring of any further erosion for the exposure of more burials.

Acknowledgements

The excavation was funded by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments (GGAT 45). Permission to excavate was kindly given by the landowner, Miss Bruce. The Trust is grateful to South Glamorgan Heritage Coast and Dr J Hubbard for their assistance during the fieldwork. The author is indebted to H J Thomas for his numerous comments on the text.

Bibliography

- Dowdell, G 1976 New Mill Farm, Monknash. Archaeology in Wales **16**, 34.
- Evans, J G, 1978 Habitat change in two Late-glacial and
French, C, and Post-glacial sites in southern Britain: the
Leighton, D molluscan evidence. In Limbrey, S and Evans,
J G (eds.) The Effect of Man on the
Landscape: the Lowland Zone (CBA Research
Report **21**), 63-74.
- GCH 1980 Glamorgan County History 3: The Middle Ages.
Glamorgan County History Trust, Cardiff.
- Gittings, C 1984 Death, Burial and the Individual in Early
Modern England. Routledge, London.
- Goodburn, R, 1978 Roman Britain in 1977. Britannia **9**, 404-485.
Hassall, M W C,
and Tomlin, R S O
- Green, C A H 1906 Notes on Churches in the Diocese of Llandaff.
- Lawson, A 1975 Shale and jet objects from Silchester.
Archaeologia **105**, 241-276.
- Locock, M 1993 Excavations at Cwm Nash, Monknash, 1993.
GGAT report **93/068**, Swansea.
- Merrick, R 1887 ed. Rice Merrick: A Booke of Glamorganshire's
Antiquities, 1578 (ed. J A Corbett). Dryden
Press, London.
- Pearson, G W, 1988 High-precision ¹⁴C measurement of Irish oaks
Pilcher, J R, to show the natural ¹⁴C variations from AD
Baillie, M G L, 1840 to 5210 BC. Radiocarbon **28 ii b**, 911-
Corbett, D M, 934.

and Qua, F

- RCAHMW 1981 Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan 4: From the Reformation to the Industrial Revolution ii: The Greater Houses. HMSO, Cardiff.
- RCAHMW 1982 Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan 3: Medieval Secular Monuments ii: Non-defensive. HMSO, Cardiff.
- Rees, W 1933 South Wales and the Borders in the 14th Century (Ordnance Survey, Southampton).
- Wardle, P 1991 Cwm Nash, Monknash. GGAT Annual Report 1990-1, 20.
- Wheeler, R E M 1943 Maiden Castle, Dorset. Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries 12.
- Williams, D H 1984 The Welsh Cistercians. Cyhoeddiadau Sistersiadd, Tenby.
- Yates, G 1984 ed. Map of Glamorgan, 1799 (ed. G Walters and B James). South Wales Record Society 2, Cardiff.
- Zienkiewicz, D 1986 The Legionary Fortress Baths at Caerleon 2: The finds. National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

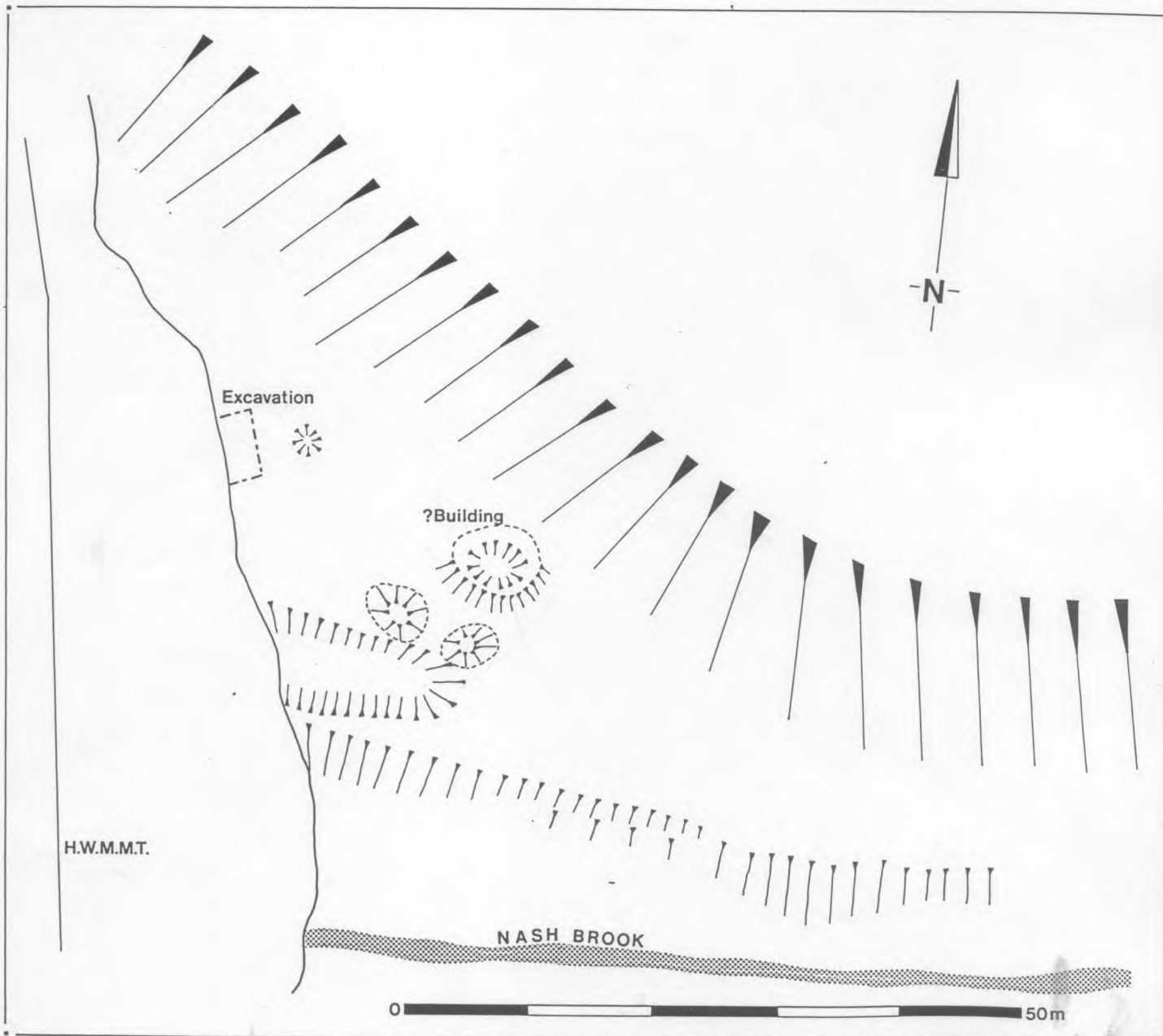


Figure 2 Earthwork survey and excavation of Cwm Nash

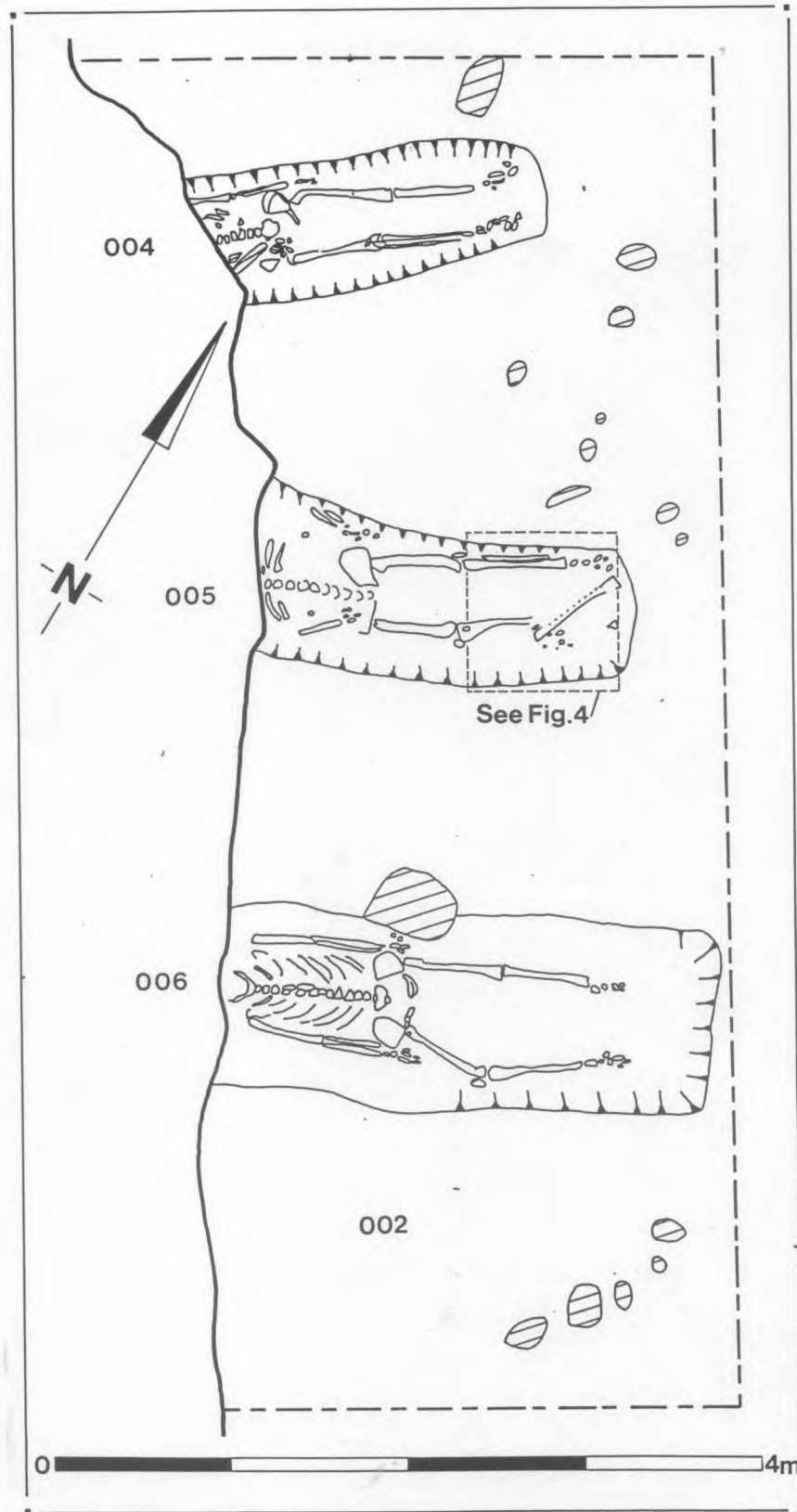


Figure 3 Excavated features: the burials

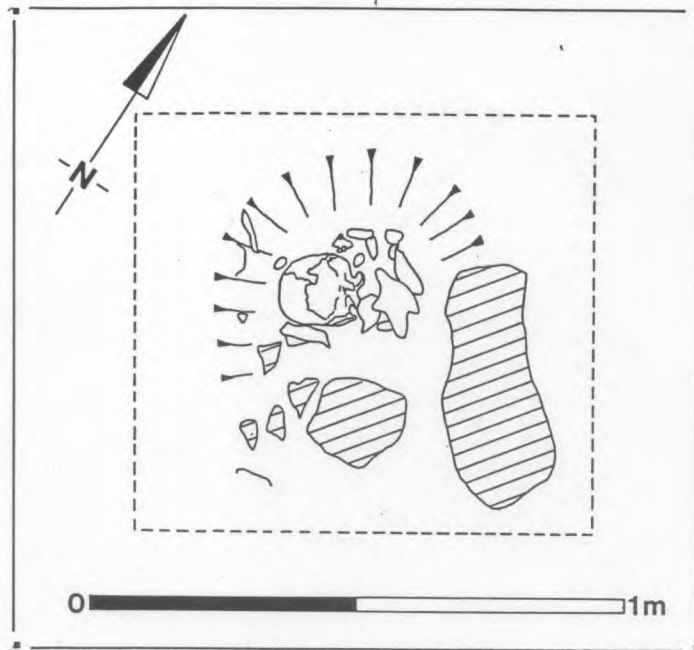


Figure 4 Excavated features: reburied skull

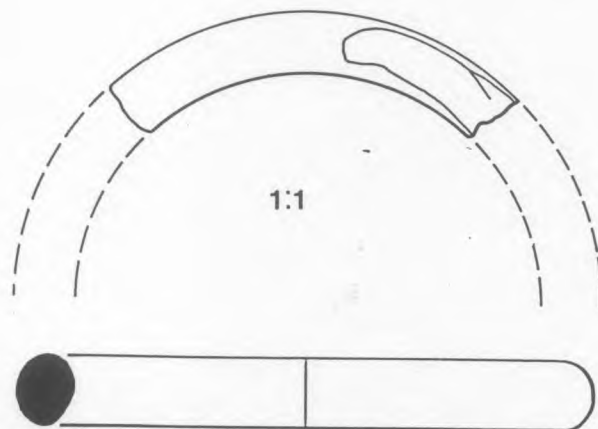


Figure 5 Finds: shale bracelet

Borlan 20 Nov 1901 P2

Macross Cwm

Down in the deepest part of the dingle is the sacred well
believed to cure some particular disease, but what it is exactly
we cannot remember, one thing is absolutely necessary to ensure
a perfect cure that is to hang up an offering to the
presiding genius. Consequently you may see the bushes & trees around
covered with bits of rag hung up by devout worshippers.

Marked cwm ... formerly the wool was made into balls and
sold all through the vale to tidy housewives, for decoration
the hearthstone & doorstep.

Notes of Jeff Alden.