

Archaeology Wales

Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



By
Dr Amelia Pannett MifA
and Hywel Keen

Report No. 1162



Archaeology Wales Limited,
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan,
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF
Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371
E-mail: admin@arch-wales.co.uk

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Edited by:

Signed:

Position:

Date:

Authorised by:

Signed:

Position:

Date:

By

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Summary

In September 2013, Archaeology Wales carried out an Archaeological Watching Brief during the hand excavation of shallow trenches to carry water pipes on Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire. The trenches were excavated around and to the east of the nineteenth century farm located on the eastern side of the island. A section of cobbling was identified, probably the remains of a farm yard, together with a linear earthwork and a collection of artefacts of predominantly nineteenth or twentieth century date. The shallow depth of the trenches ensured that there was little impact on any buried archaeology, and no significant features were identified.

1. Introduction

In June 2013, Archaeology Wales was commissioned by The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales to carry out an Archaeological Watching Brief during works during the laying of new water pipes on the eastern side of Skokholm Island (Grid Ref: SM 73848 05131; fig. 1). The site comprises rough grazing and open moorland on the eastern side of the island, within fields belonging to the former farm. The pipes are being laid to connect two new water tanks to provide water to the accommodation buildings on the island. The local planning authority is the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and the planning application number is NP/12/0334.

Skokholm Island lies 5km off the western Pembrokeshire coast, close to the Milford Haven Waterway. The island is known to contain archaeological evidence for occupation during the Mesolithic and Neolithic period, together with more modern medieval and post-medieval farming remains. As a consequence, Zoe Bevans-Rice, in her capacity as Archaeological Advisor to the local planning authority recommended that an archaeological watching brief was carried out during all groundworks associated with the installation of the water pipes.

The work was carried out between the 9th and 11th September 2013 by Hywel Keen.

2. Site Description

2.1 Location, geology and topography

Skokholm Island is located 5km west of the coast of Pembrokeshire, close to the western end of the Milford Haven Waterway. The island is largely flat, rising up to 40m AOD towards its centre. The underlying geology is Devonian/Silurian Milford Haven Group Sandstone.

2.2 Historical Background

Little archaeological work has been undertaken on Skokholm, and consequently the history of the island is only poorly understood. Scatters of lithics typologically dated to the Mesolithic period have been found, however, demonstrating that the landscape would have been exploited by hunter-gatherers over 6000 years ago. Recent work by the RCAHMS has revealed evidence for later prehistoric and medieval occupation and agricultural activities on the island. LiDAR surveys have revealed early field systems and possibly ridge and furrow cultivation in the south-west of the island though to be Iron Age in date, while two large house platforms of probable medieval date have been identified close to the modern buildings.

The extant farm buildings and field boundaries date to the nineteenth century, and were probably built over the remains of earlier farming infrastructure. The 1st Edition

OS map of 1875 shows that only the eastern side of the island had been improved, with the western side remaining open moorland. A lime kiln is depicted as located to the east of the farm buildings, close to the shore at South Haven, suggesting that materials used to build the structures on the site were manufactured locally.

In the twentieth century the island became a bird observatory with the farm buildings being used to house wardens, volunteers and visitors.

3. Watching Brief Results

The groundworks for the installation of the water pipes consisted of a series of hand dug trenches around and to the east of the main buildings (fig. 3). The trenches were U-shaped in profile, around 200m in total length, and on average 0.3 to 0.4m wide at the top with an average depth of 0.2 to 0.25m. Two stretches of trench dug to the east of the building complex were shallower and narrower, averaging 0.2m wide at the top and 0.1 to 0.15m deep.

Ground conditions varied little across the area except near the well/pond where the ground was wetter. The turf and topsoil averaged 0.1 to 0.15m in depth. The subsoil comprised a red brown sandy clay with stone inclusions. Neither bedrock nor natural was observed during the excavation. It should be noted that the shallower trenches barely affected the subsoil.

Two areas of archaeological interest were identified during the watching brief.

The first comprised a linear earthwork running north-south roughly parallel to the extant wall to the west of the building complex (fig. 3 No. 1). The linear consisted of an earthen mound that consisted of redeposited subsoil with no stone inclusions (fig. 4). There was no visible buried turf line and no artefacts were recovered. A similar linear was visible to the east of the building complex.

A second area of archaeological interest was identified within the gateway into the building complex (fig. 3 No. 2). Here, a thin layer (0.1m thick) of rough cobbling was encountered, which was slightly convex in section (fig. 5). This produced 19th and 20th century pottery and a redeposited flint flake. The trenches within the interior area of the building complex also produced similar pottery together with brick roof slate and modern iron remains.

The pipe trenches ran close to a number of drystone field walls and a possible sheepfold. No finds were identified away from the building complex, with the shallow nature of the trenching the likely reason for this (see figs. 6 and 7 for further pipe trench views).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The watching brief during the excavation of pipe trenches on Skokholm Island identified some traces of earlier occupation, including a single lithic, an earthen bank and nineteenth century finds and agricultural features. All of the artefacts were identified within the confines of the building complex, and all were recovered from the topsoil or subsoil. The earthen bank to the west of the building complex was cut through by the pipe trench and was revealed to comprise redeposited subsoil. No dating material was recovered and consequently the significance of this feature is not

understood. The cobbling revealed within the gate into the building complex is likely to be nineteenth century in date, and related to the use of the area as a yard.

The shallow nature of the trenches excavated to accommodate the water pipes resulted in little disturbance to the subsoil. The natural bedrock was not exposed in any of the trenches.

5. Acknowledgements

Thanks to the staff and volunteers on Skokholm for their assistance with the watching brief and all the delicious cakes!

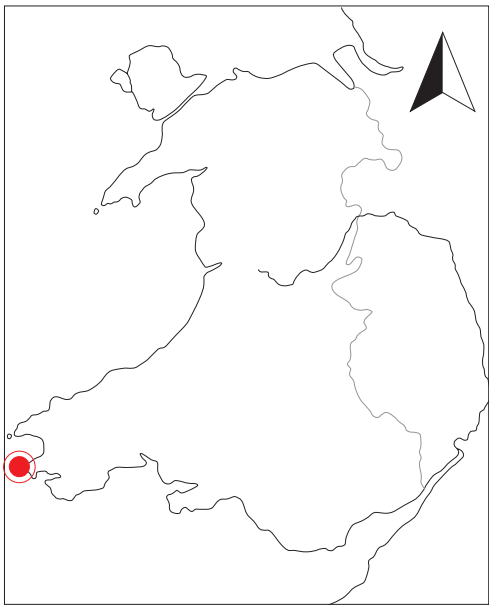


Fig. 1
Location of
site

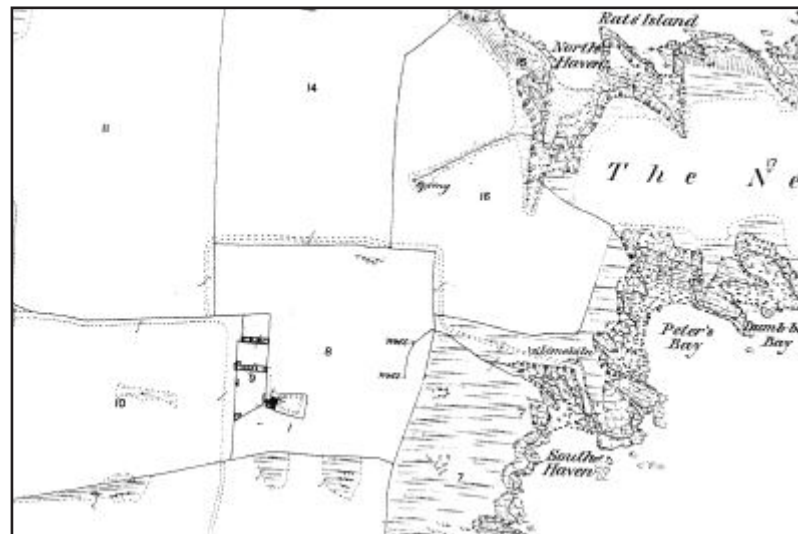


Fig. 2
1875 OS 1st Edition
map showing the
farm buildings on
Skokholm Island



Fig. 3
Map showing the location of the new water pipe trenches



Fig. 4
View of linear
earthwork with
trenches cut
through

scales = 1m



Fig. 5
View of cobbled
surface within gate
to building complex

Scale = 2m



Pipe trench excavated to the west of the building complex



Pipe trench excavated to the east of the building complex

Fig. 6
View of excavated
trench around the
building complex

Scale = 2m



Fig. 6
View of excavated
trench east of the
building complex

Scale = 1m

Archaeology Wales



Archaeology Wales Limited

Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan, Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF

Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371

Email: admin@arch-wales.co.uk

Company Directors: Mark Houlston MIFA & Jill Houlston
Company Registered No. 7440770 (England & Wales).
Registered office: Morgan Griffiths LLP, Cross Chambers,
9 High Street, Newtown, Powys, SY16 2NY