

# SKOMER ISLAND WARDEN'S HOUSE, PEMBROKESHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
DECEMBER 2005



Paratowyd gan: Archaeoleg Cambria  
Ar gyfer: Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru  
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## ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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## SKOMER ISLAND, WARDEN'S HOUSE, PEMBROKESHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Gan / By

**Pete Crane BA Hons MIFA**

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**Photo 1:** Trenches excavated previously. View east

**Photo 2:** Possible buried turf line (dark lens c. 0.2m down). Front trench. View SSE. Scale 0.5m

**Figure 1:** Site Location and adjacent archaeological sites

*Front cover: New Warden's House foundation trenches. View east*

## **SUMMARY**

*A single day watching brief was undertaken while footing trenches were completed for a Warden's House. Evidence suggests that the surrounding area had a large number of prehistoric features, and there is also evidence of considerable medieval and post medieval activity. However, nothing of archaeological interest was recording during the watching brief.*

## INTRODUCTION

Cambria Archaeology-Heritage Management, as advisors to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Planning Department, identified potential impact on the archaeological resource during groundworks on the proposed re-building of the Warden's House on Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire. An archaeological condition was therefore required in relation to Planning Application NP/00/501, Grid reference SM73520943. Cambria Archaeology-Field Operations undertook this project for the Countryside Council of Wales.

The surrounding area contains a number of recorded sites (Figure 1) in the regional Sites and Monuments Record. Sites adjacent to the development are listed below using their Primary Record Numbers (PRN). Sites which are also Scheduled Ancient Monuments are indicated (SAM).

- PRN 2921 (SM723095), Skomer Island II, open settlement, Iron Age? Earthwork, SAM
- PRN 2923 (SM73360952), Harold Stone, standing stone, Bronze Age, Observed Structure
- PRN 2925 (SM732093), Captain Kites, flint-working floor? Mesolithic? Finds. SAM
- PRN 2926 (SM73600890), South Castle, hillfort, Iron Age, earthwork, SAM
- PRN 2927 (SM73600932), The Neck, unknown, medieval, Building (potentially a chapel or church)
- PRN 7577 (SM732095), Skomer Island, field system, medieval? Earthwork, SAM

There are a number of other sites on Skomer Island and some of these are included on Figure 1. However, due to the negative results of this watching brief, it is not considered appropriate here to go into the archaeological history of the Island.

The objectives of the watching brief were to characterise and record the extent, chronology and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits identified during the groundworks.

The development replaces an earlier, modern building on the site, which was located on the sloping hillside above a steep cliff; the front of the building was on the northeast, overlooking North Haven. The former building was aligned approximately northwest to southeast. The rear, west corner and northwestern end had been terraced into the hillside and the eastern corner probably raised to form the building platform.

The earlier building had been demolished and its concrete floor taken up. Also the rear and northwestern parts of the footing trenches for the new structure had been excavated and left open (photo 1). It had been intended that all of the footing trenches would have been subject to a watching brief. However, due to delays the building programme was behind schedule and the ferry would not be returning on the day in question. Therefore after consultation it was decided that the footing trenches would be left open for a later visit when the full extent of the groundworks would be undertaken.

The site visit was on 22 November 2005. The weather was calm, but only just above freezing, overcast and with increasingly thick fog. Photographic conditions

were consequently poor. Digital photographs were taken but only one black and white print was attempted.

## **RESULTS**

A mini tracked digger using a toothed bucket undertook all excavation. Footing trenches were c. 0.8m. Depths of trenches were from around 0.5m deep at the northwest end, to nearly 1m deep at the southeast. The footing trenches consisted of a rectangular trench for the exterior walls and an internal trench running along the middle of the length of the building (photo front cover). The footing imprint was 25m by 8m.

As the previous building had been terraced into the hillside any archaeological features in the rear and northwest sides of the building plot would have been destroyed. Also cutting across the platform towards the northwest end was a pipe trench. The footing trench for the front of the new building encountered a considerable amount of concrete and footings along its outer edge. The bases of these structures were removed from within the trench. All of the trenches were excavated down to a red subsoil (shaly stone mixed with varying amounts of sand and clay/silt). Above this was a light brown silty sandy loam, where it had not been dug away by the terracing or suffered from modern disturbance. This was probably the remains of the former topsoil, which was buried below the concrete raft or floor of the earlier building. Within this topsoil there were lenses of darker soil, possibly buried turf layers (photo 2), but also in other places silted in animal burrows. There were also considerable bracken root disturbances in places.

Any large archaeological features cut in the subsoil would have been visible. No such features were identified. Any small features such as postholes, shallow gullies, or un-bonded stone footings most likely would have been destroyed when the site was first developed, probably in the 1970s.

A quick reconnaissance was made over part of the trackway from this site up to the old farmhouse. This had been disturbed to a great extent by contractor's vehicles and in parts scraped off due to very wet and muddy conditions. Again nothing of interest was seen.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

No significant archaeological features or deposits were identified during the watching brief on this plot. It is unlikely that any such features would have survived in over half of the new build area due to the terracing and construction of the building platform. It is recommended that any future vehicle trackway disturbances have an archaeological planning condition.



**Photo 1:** Trenches excavated previously. View east



**Photo 2:** Photo 3. Possible buried turf line (dark lens c. 0.2m down). Front trench. View SSE. Scale 0.5m

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**Figure 1:** Site Location and adjacent archaeological sites



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ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.  
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

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