

CENTRE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology
Queen's University Belfast



Data Structure Report No. 49

The excavation of a Bronze Age cist Burial in Church Bay, Rathlin Island,
Co. Antrim

AE/06/187





The Excavation of a Bronze Age Cist Burial

Demesne Townland

Church Bay

Rathlin Island

Co. Antrim

Brian Sloan

CAF DSR No. 49
Licence No. AE/06/187

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1 Summary

1.1 *Background*

1.1.1 An archaeological excavation was carried out to the rear of Mc Cuaig's Bar, Church Bay, Rathlin Island. Active erosion of a gravel slope had occurred following the disturbance of the ground in advance of the construction of a car park to the rear of the building. This erosion exposed the capstone of a Bronze Age cist burial and this was investigated by Declan Hurl of the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage in February 2006. The initial excavation involved the lifting of the capstone, the recording of the contents and their removal. During the excavation, a pit containing human remains was observed in the section above the cist, and this provided a focus for a further investigation by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork.

1.1.2 The work lasted for two weeks from 26th September to 6th October 2006 and was conducted under licence No. AE/06/187.

1.2 *Aims*

1.2.1 The primary aim of this investigation was to expose the human remains in the pit, record them *in situ* and process the assemblage at Queen's University Belfast.

1.2.2 A secondary aim was to fully expose and plan the cist.

1.3 *Excavation*

1.3.1 The excavation consisted of a single trench measuring 3m x 3m, centred on the cist and the pit burial. The trench was hand excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted of raised beach gravel material.

1.3.2 A relatively complex stratigraphic sequence was encountered in the excavation. A large gravel extraction pit (Context No. 110) had been excavated close to the cist in modern times. The fill of this pit consisted of linear bands of peaty loam, clay and sand. A piece of plastic was recovered from the basal fill (Context No 113) indicating this pit is not of antiquity.

1.3.3 The shallow pit containing disarticulated human remains was excavated. Excavation demonstrated that a series of contexts filled the cut of the pit (Context No. 112). These included a layer of irregular limestone slabs directly overlying the disarticulated human remains. However, due to continuing erosion of the section face during the excavation, only a small proportion of the disarticulated remains were observed *in situ*.

1.3.4 During the excavation, a second cist was encountered protruding from the north facing section. The secondary cist appeared to be smaller than the main cist, although due to time constraints on the excavation, was not investigated and was left *in situ*.

1.3.5 The main cist was fully exposed and planned. Upon removal of the remnants of the gravel extraction pit (Context No. 110) and shallow burial pit (Context No. 112), a cut for the cist was observed (Context No. 123). This took the form of a curvilinear feature around the western side of the side lintels of the cist. However, erosion had destroyed any sign of the cut continuing on the eastern side.

1.4 *Results*

1.4.1 The excavation at Church Bay, Rathlin Island was successful in that it fulfilled the aims of the investigation. The excavation revealed the presence of two cist burials as well as the disarticulated remains from the pit. Post excavation analysis is ongoing on the remains, and it is hoped that a series of radiocarbon dates will shed further light on the burial sequence at Church Bay.

1.5 *Recommendations*

1.5.1 All recommendations on how to bring this project to completion are detailed in section 5 of this report.

1.5.2 A series of radiocarbon dates are required from the cist burial and from the disarticulated remains from the pit.

1.5.3 A preliminary report on the tri-partite vessel has been completed by Naomi Carver (CAF). It is envisaged that further research into the style of the vessel will show comparisons with other cist burials in Ireland.

- 1.5.4 Preliminary analysis, for the purpose of this report, has also been carried out on the articulated skeleton from the cist (Eileen Murphy QUB) and on the disarticulated human remains from the shallow pit (Clare Mc Granaghan CAF). However, further osteological analysis and the production of a detailed human bone report is needed to bring this project to completion.



Figure 1: General location map of Rathlin Island showing Church Bay area (red dot).

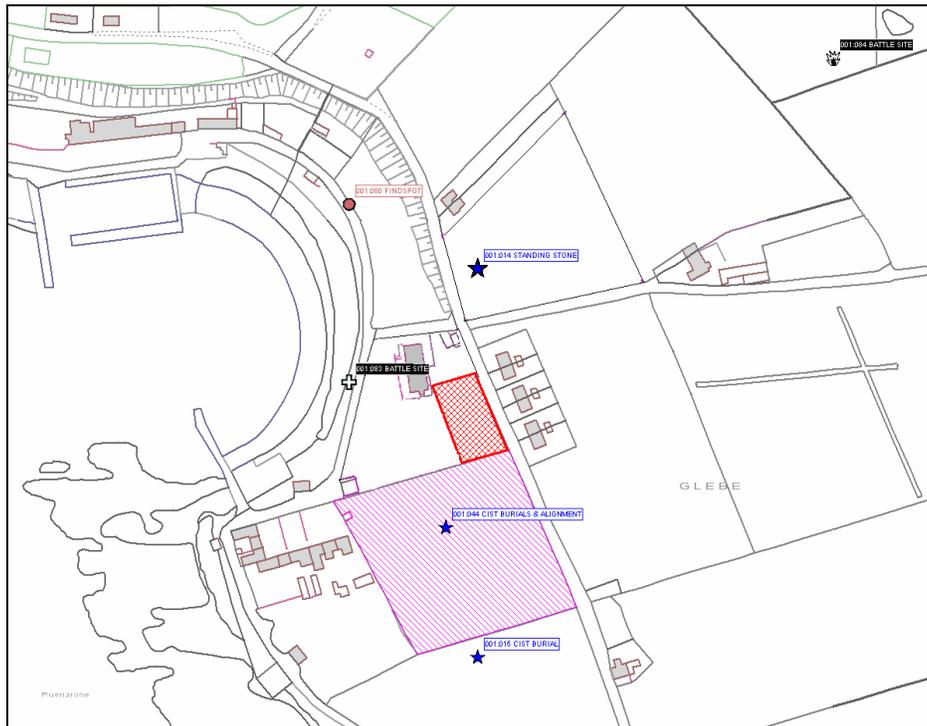


Figure 2: Detailed location map showing area under investigation (shaded red). Purple area to the south denotes the location of Wiggins' excavation (1983).

2 Introduction

2.1 General

2.1.1 A small scale excavation was carried out on a Bronze Age cist burial to the rear of Mc Cuaig's bar, Demesne Townland, Church Bay, Rathlin Island. This investigation was in response to an initial investigation carried out by Declan Hurl of the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage in February 2006, following the exposure of the capstone of a cist by erosion. The initial investigation resulted in the capstone being lifted and the contents of the cist recorded and removed. The follow up investigation was designed to excavate a pit that contained human remains which had been observed in the section. The process of erosion was exposing the remains and they were falling from this section face.

2.1.2 A small crew of members of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork carried out the excavation from Tuesday 26th September until Friday 6th October 2006. This work was directed by Brian Sloan under Licence No. AE/06/187.

2.2 Geological background

2.2.1 The underground geology of the Church Bay area is white chalk with flints, whilst the rest of the island is largely composed of basalt originating from the cooling of a lava flow, formed during the Cainozoic Era approximately 65 million years BP (Mitchell 2004, 205). A raised beach exists overlying the white chalk with flints in Church Bay, which consists of small rounded gravel pebbles.

2.3 The Church Bay Area

2.3.1 Church Bay is situated about the middle of the Island and is a flattish area sandwiched between the higher ground of the eastern and southern ends of Rathlin Island. Today the area provides the nucleus for the present population.

2.3.2 The Church Bay area has long been known for its archaeological potential. Numerous entries exist in the Sites and Monuments Record detailing archaeological monuments and find spots in the area, as well as battle sites. The entries in the SMR have been tabulated below:

SMR No.	Description
ANT 001:014	Standing stone
ANT 001:015	Cist burial reputedly discovered by ploughing in 1870
ANT 001:044	Bronze Age cist cemetery excavated by Kenny Wiggins in 1983
ANT 001:080	Find spot of a Viking(?) boat in 1920
ANT 001:083	Battle site between the Mc Donnell Scots and the English under Sir Ralph Bagnal in September 1551
ANT 001:084	Battle site between the Mac Donnells and Sir Duncan Campbell's forces in 1642

Table 1: Sites and Monuments in the Church Bay area.

2.4 *Historical background into archaeological investigations in the Church Bay area.*

2.4.1 Church Bay has provided the focus for a number of antiquarian investigations dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries as well as in more recent times. The results of these investigations reinforced local opinion that the Church Bay area provided a focal point for prehistoric burial. Many chance finds of bone and artefacts have probably gone unrecorded (Wiggins 2000, 47), however, some notable exceptions exist.

2.4.2 Writing in 1784, Dr Hamilton states that a number of 'small tumuli were lately opened on a small plain about the middle of the island'. Although no evidence exists of this landscape today, Hamilton appears to be describing a number of mounds (possibly Bronze Age barrows?) as having been present in the Church Bay area. Hamilton also details the discovery of a 'chief' lying in a stone coffin next to an earthenware vessel, a description analogous to a cist burial. He also refers to the discovery of numerous bronze swords and spear heads, and the 'Rathlin brooch', a ninth or tenth-century example of a pennanular brooch apparently recovered from a mound in Church Bay, today marked by a standing stone (ANT 001:014) (Hamilton 1822, 21).

2.4.3 Mrs C Gage, a nineteenth century antiquarian discussed Hamilton's investigations into the Church Bay area as part of her general history of Rathlin Island. She details the above burial as being found in a 'field that has been newly enclosed a short distance from the shore of Church Bay' and that the skeletons were 'each surrounded by slabs of rough stone placed edgewise, and covered at the top with large flat stones' (Gage 1851, 12-18).

- 2.4.4 Mrs Gage also describes a second series of burials that were uncovered contemporary to her writing, probably in the vicinity of the boathouse on the south-eastern side of Church Bay. She discusses two articulated skeleton burials, one of which contained an iron sword and an 'urn containing ashes' (*ibid.*16). Warner has interpreted this burial as a Bronze Age cist which has later been reused as a Viking burial (on account of the description of the sword) (Warner 1974, 64).
- 2.4.5 The Rev. H. I. Law, writing in 1961 details the discovery of a burial, in 1941, in the same field that the standing stone (ANT 001:014) is situated. He states that the grave was 'five sided with the two longest sides being parallel while the head formed two equal sides of a triangle' and covered by a single slab of stone. He notes that "no tools, weapons or ornaments were discovered" within the grave, but does not detail how the skeleton was orientated. He states that the graves in this field were believed by the locals to be of some of the men of the Campbell clan who died at a battle in 1642. He places this encounter at "*Lack-na-bhista-vor*" (The Hollow of the Defeated), a small hollow to the south of the standing stone (Law, 1962).
- 2.4.6 The shape of the five sided cist as described by Law, would suggest that the skeleton was flexed rather than crouched. This may suggest that this burial is not Bronze Age in origin, and perhaps relates to the use of the area for interment at a later date. Indeed the discovery of a ninth or tenth-century pennanular brooch (now housed in the National Museum of Ireland) in proposed association to the standing stone (Hamilton 1822) all suggest re-use of the site in the Early Christian and Medieval times.
- 2.4.7 The view that this area was used for interment in more recent times is supported by O'Lavery. He details the monastic site established by St. Comgall in the sixth century and reputedly where the church of St. Thomas now stands. This area, with the cliffs to the rear and sea to the fore would not have provided the monastery with adequate lands for the church, monk's cells etc. It is for that purpose "the whole of the land extending from the old coast-guard station across the glebe-land to the standing stone seems to have been used" as a burial ground for the monastery (O'Lavery, 1887, 375). However, he does state that he thought the area may have been used as a cemetery in 'pagan times'.

2.5 *Kenny Wiggins' excavations 1983*

- 2.5.1 Following the extraction of gravel from a field close to the shore of Church Bay, to the immediate south of the excavation site (Figure 2), a number of limestone slabs were observed as having been disturbed. Archaeological excavation demonstrated that these slabs represented the capstones of Bronze Age cist burials.
- 2.5.2 In all, seven inhumation burials were encountered in the excavation, as well as evidence from the Neolithic and Early Christian periods. The cist burials were recovered in a varying condition, significant damage having been inflicted by the mechanical diggers prior to archaeological intervention.
- 2.5.3 Probably the most intriguing of the burials was Grave 2. This burial had been heavily truncated by mechanical diggers prior to archaeologists being present on site. However, enough evidence existed to indicate the remains of at least five skeletons. A 'straight sided pottery vessel' was found associated with the articulated remains of skeleton 3 (Wiggins 2000, 48). A ring ditch, with a diameter of at least 6m, was revealed surrounding the cist, which may indicate the importance of the monument as a nucleus to the surrounding burials. Also the presence of multiple burials in this cist indicates the re-use of the monument as a burial site. Wiggins proposed that the skeletal remains may represent members of a family interred in the same monument. Due to the presence of the ring ditch, Wiggins has also put forward the idea that this monument could have been covered by a mound (as indicated by Hamilton in the eighteenth century). Certainly the digging of the ring ditch would have thrown up a substantial amount of spoil and it is possible that this spoil was utilised to cover the cist. However, this is speculative as no mound (or trace thereof) existed at the time of excavation (*ibid*, 50).

2.6 *Background*

- 2.6.1 The cist first came to the attention of the Environment and Heritage service after disturbance had occurred to the slope of a raised beach deposit. The capstone of a Bronze Age cist burial was visible protruding from the section face.
- 2.6.2 Declan Hurl (Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage) was alerted to the location of the cist and the continually deteriorating condition of the site as a whole, by Andrew Gault (EHS Caseworker for the area). A small scale excavation was undertaken

in February 2006, when the cist was partially excavated, the capstone removed and the contents of the cist recorded and lifted. The cist contained the crouched skeleton of a male, along with a complete highly decorated Early Bronze Age tri-partite food vessel.

2.6.3 During the excavation, a pit containing the disarticulated human bone was observed in the section above the cist. The investigation of this feature was to provide the focus for another excavation carried out by the CAF and is the basis of this report.

2.7 *Research Objectives*

2.7.1 The research objective for the investigation was two-fold. The first priority of the excavation was the recovery of the remainder of the disarticulated bone from the pit above the cist. It was hoped that estimations about their date and purpose of deposition could be made following the observation of the remains *in situ*. However, due to the continued erosion of the section face of the site, the majority of the remains were recovered from an unstratified position.

2.7.2 The second objective was to fully expose the cist so that a comprehensive plan could be made, and it was hoped that full excavation of the area surrounding the cist would reveal the cut of the feature that the cist was inserted into.

2.8 *Archiving*

2.8.1 Copies of this report have been deposited with the Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage. All site records and finds are temporarily archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

2.9 *Credits and Acknowledgements*

2.9.1 The excavation was directed by Brian Sloan. The excavation team consisted of Janet Bell, Sarah Gormley, Clare Mc Granaghan and Ruth Logue.

2.9.2 Assistance during the course of the excavation and the writing of the report was kindly provided by: Naomi Carver (CAF), Colm Donnelly (CAF), Wes Forsythe (CMA), Declan

Hurl (EHS), Peter Mc Auley (QUB), Philip Macdonald (CAF), Clare Mc Granaghan (CAF), David McIlreavy (CAF), Eileen Murphy (QUB) and Ruairi O'Baoill (CAF).

- 2.9.3 The author is also particularly grateful to the landowner Mr Peter Mc Curdy (Mc Cuaig's Bar, Rathlin Island) for facilitating the excavation.

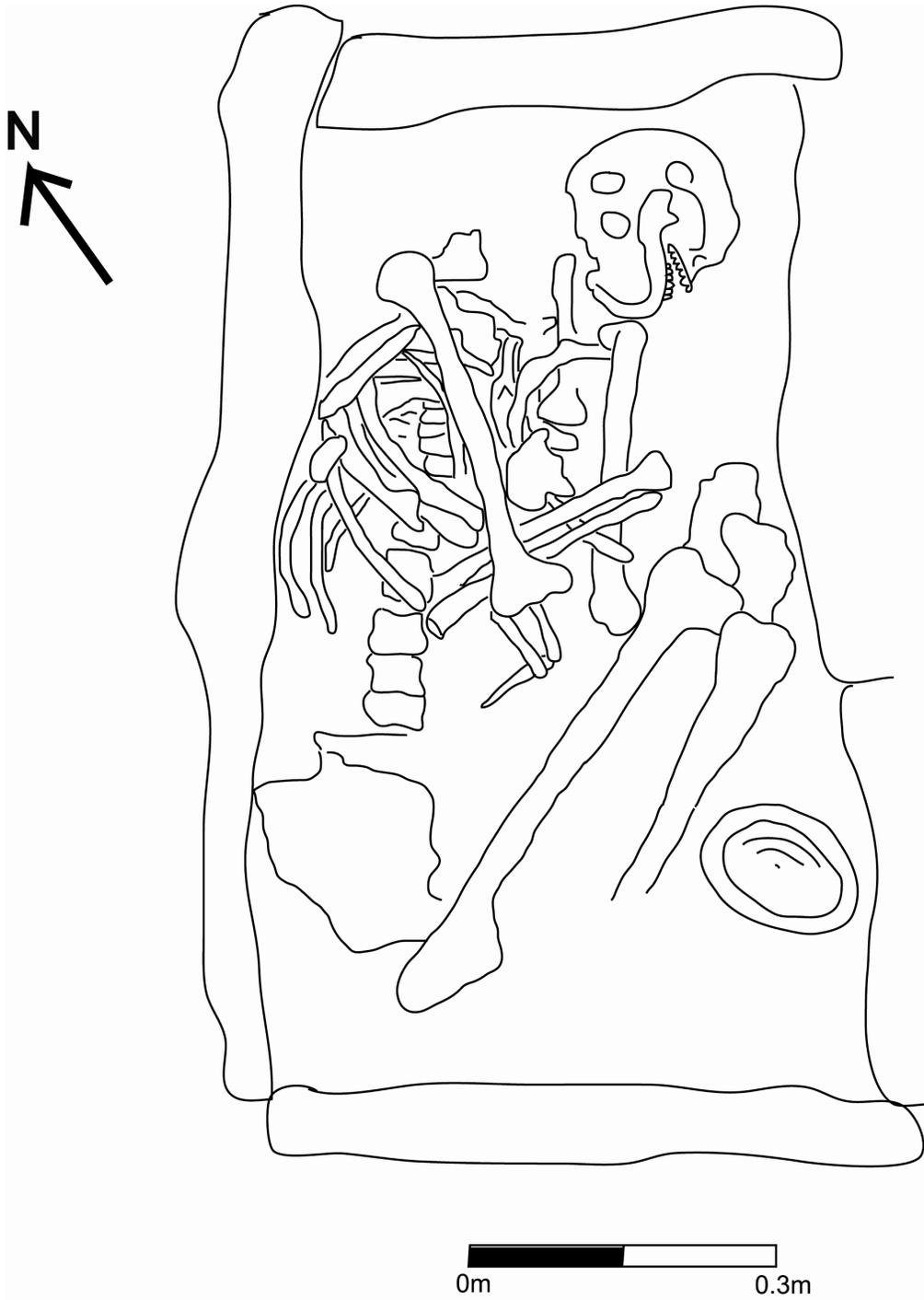


Figure 3: Reproduction of the original plan of the cist, produced and provided by Wes Forsythe (CMA).

3 Excavation

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 The programme of work at the site of the cist burial involved the opening of a single trench (measuring 3m x 3m) centred on the cist and pit burial. The trench was manually excavated to the natural subsoil which consisted of raised beach gravel.

3.1.2 The excavation of the archaeological strata was undertaken by hand using standard context recording methods. The principle site records consist of context sheets, drawn and photographic register augmented by a site diary. A series of overall plans (Scale 1:20) and section drawings (Scale 1:10) were prepared on site. For details of site photography see Appendix Three and for details of field illustrations see Appendix Four. In addition, separate registers were kept for small finds (Appendix Five) and samples (Appendix Six). It is recommended that the Harris Matrix for the trench is consulted when reading the account of the excavation (see Appendix Two).

3.1.2 The unique site code used to identify the records generated during the excavation was 'CBC 06'.

3.2 Account of the excavation

3.2.1 A 3m x 3m trench was opened in the area centered on the cist and burial observed in the section. Initially, the redeposited gravel mound (Context Nos. 101, 102 and 103) that was over the site was manually removed until the original ground surface (Context No. 104) was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.9m. This layer was a mid-grey, brown sandy loam, which had significant organic inclusions. Numerous rusted drink tins and fragments of plastic were recovered sitting directly on top of this layer and it appears that the mound of gravel had been redeposited relatively recently.

3.2.2 Directly below the modern ground surface (Context No. 104) was a layer of dark brown sandy loam (Context No. 115) which had a high frequency of limestone and flint pebbles, probably derived from raised beach deposits. This layer had a maximum thickness of 0.08m and directly overlay Context No. 116 and the cut of a large pit (Context No. 110 – 1.2m north/south x 0.97m east/west x 0.78m deep). The upper most fill of this pit (Context No. 106) was a mid-brown gritty loam. The other fills of this pit comprised of a

- loose grey sand (Context No. 107), a mid brown peaty humic loam (Context No. 108), a compact yellow clay (Context No. 109), a light brown silty sand (Context No. 113) and a dark brown loamy sand (Context No. 114). The lowest deposit in this pit (Context No.113) produced a sherd of a glass bottle, thus proving the pit as being modern in date. This stratigraphy is interpreting as representing the backfilling of a modern gravel extraction pit.
- 3.2.3 The pit (Context No. 110) was cut into a dark brown, black gritty loam (Context No.116) which the dark brown sand loam (Context No. 115) also overlay. The gritty loam (Context No. 116) had a maximum thickness of 0.07m and whilst quite similar to the sandy loam (Context No. 115), the relative absence of the water rolled pebbles was noted.
- 3.2.4 The gritty loam (Context No. 116) overlay a shallow pit (Context No. 112), measuring 1.3m north/south by 0.8m east/west and had a maximum depth of 0.28m, cutting the natural raised beach material (Context No. 111/118). The uppermost fill consisted of black-brown gritty sand (Context No. 117), with a maximum thickness of 0.07m. This deposit directly overlay a layer of small rounded gravel (Context No. 120) within which were present a series of large angular, flattish limestone rocks (Context No. 121), average size 0.30m x 0.45m x 0.20m,.
- 3.2.5 Both the limestone rocks and the gravel overlay a deposit of dark brown gritty sand (Context No. 122) that contained numerous fragments of disarticulated human bone. However, due to the weather conditions throughout the excavation, only a small proportion of this skeletal material was observed in situ; the majority of the remains had eroded from the section face and were collected as a bulk soil sample (Context No. 105). The stratigraphically earliest fill of this pit was an upright limestone slab (Context No.127) set against the northern edge of the cut (Context No. 112). The aforementioned deposits (Context Nos. 117, 120, 121 and 122) all butted against this slab, perhaps suggesting a formal arrangement for this burial.
- 3.2.6 Along the southern edge of the trench, another limestone slab was observed protruding from the section. Initially this was assumed to be another slab edging the pit (Context No. 112) and it was postulated that the burial actually lay in a stone lined pit. However, upon further investigation, it was revealed to be the capstone of a further cist (Context No.126). The measurements of the second cist are approximately 0.56m east-west and 0.60m

north-south. This is smaller than the main cist whose length was recorded as approximately 1.4m. No cut was observed for this cist.

- 3.2.7 Once both the burial pit (Context No. 112) and the modern gravel extraction pit (Context No. 110) were fully excavated, a cut (Context No. 123) was visible for the main cist (Context No. 124). This took the form of a curvilinear cut around the eastern side of the main cist, approximately 0.5m from the outside edge of the side lintels (See Plate 4). Unfortunately, due to erosion and the slippage of the gravel, the full extent of the cut was not observed. A box section was excavated through the cut and its depth was recorded as being approximately 0.22m. The fill (Context No. 125) consisted of dark gritty sand and had numerous limestone pebbles/gravel incorporated in it. The main cist contained the articulated remains of a crouched male skeleton (Context No. 128), as well as a complete highly decorated tri-partite food vessel. No other material was recovered from within the cist.
- 3.2.8 The main cist, secondary cist and shallow pit had been excavated into the natural subsoil (Context Nos. 111/118) which consisted of a matrix of rounded pebbles and raised beach material.

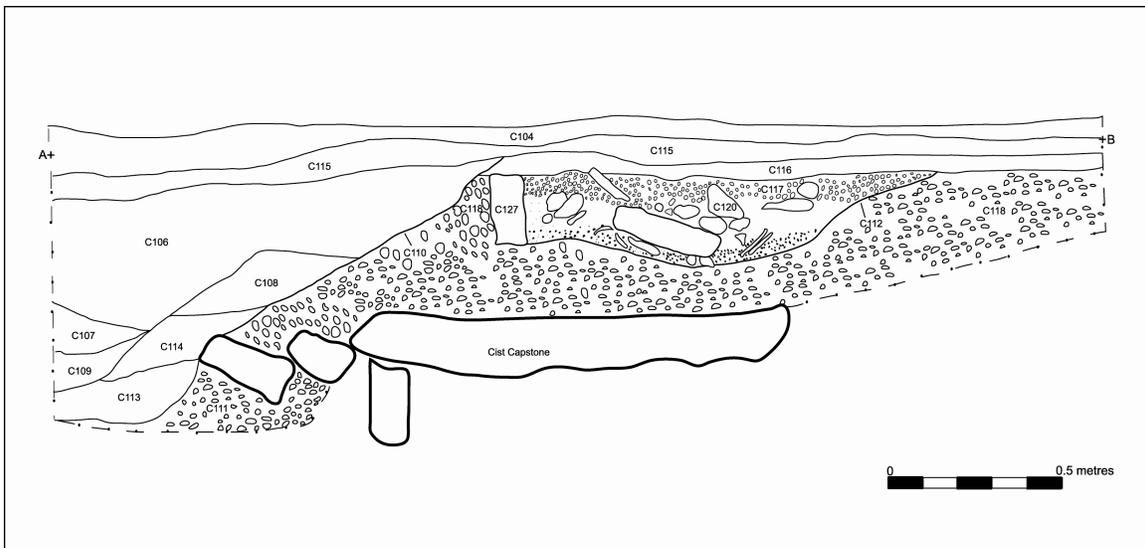


Figure 4: West facing section of the trench following removal of scree overburden (Context Nos. 101, 102 and 103)

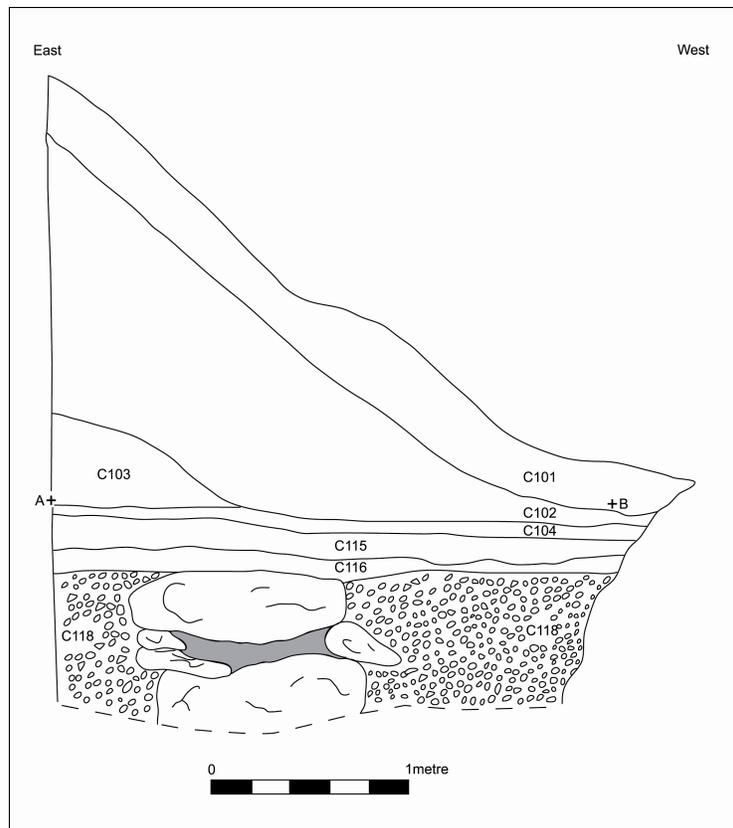


Figure 5: North facing section of the trench. Note secondary cist protruding from the section.

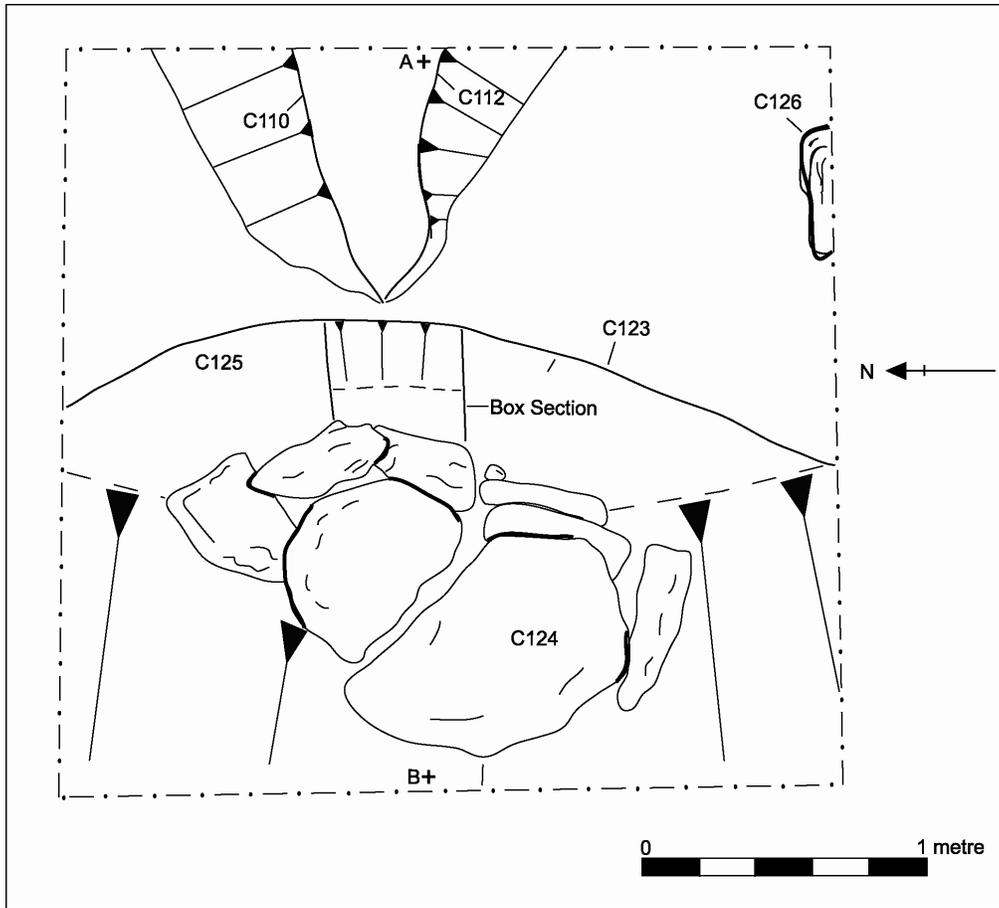


Figure 6: Post-excitation plan of trench.

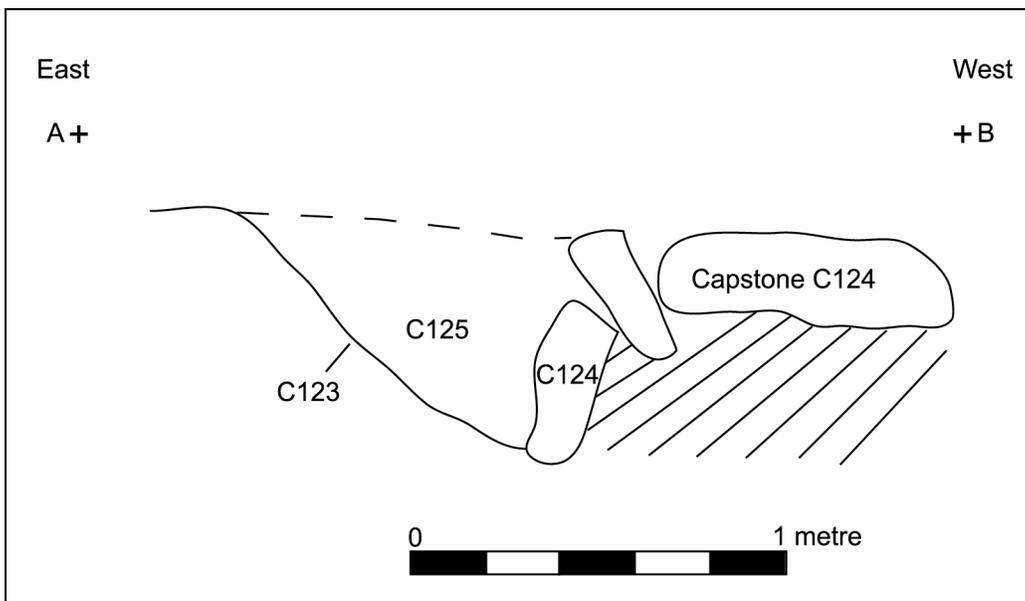


Figure 7: North facing section of cut Context No.123.

4 Discussion

4.1 *Introduction*

4.1.1 The discovery of the two cists in the excavation brings the total of known Bronze Age cist burials in church bay to nine, although, taking into account the antiquarian investigations in the area, this total is likely to be over a dozen. The inhumation cist investigated in the excavation provides further information on prehistoric burial in Church Bay, Rathlin Island.

4.1.2 The main inhumation cist follows the trend for Rathlin Island Bronze Age burial. Six out of the seven cist burials investigated by Kenny Wiggins contained inhumation burials (with grave 2 containing the remains of at least five individuals. The remaining cist (Grave 5) was empty, although it had incurred severe damage by a mechanical digger.

4.1.3 Taking Wiggins' excavated evidence into account, with the evidence gathered from the inhumation cist investigated by this project, it would appear that the formal cist inhumation constituted a significant part of the burial repertoire on Rathlin during the Bronze Age. However, the antiquarian documentary evidence does indicate that cremation was also practiced on the island. In paragraph 2.4.4 details have already been provided about an 'urn containing ashes' as described by Mrs Gage in 1851.

4.2 *The cist skeleton and the disarticulated burial*

4.2.1 Provisional analysis of the skeletal remains from the cist has indicated that it is a male, approximately 6'1 and of sturdy build. It is estimated that he was between 40 and 50 years old when he died. There were no obvious pathologies evident in the skeleton, although a degree of degenerative joint disease was evident in the vertebrae and main joints (Eileen Murphy pers comm.). Further analysis of these remains will hopefully shed light on this picture.

4.2.3 Provisional analysis has also been carried out on the human bone assemblage from the pit (Context No. 112). It is estimated that at least two individuals are represented by the assemblage as many of the bones are duplicated (Clare McGranaghan pers comm.). The duplicated bones are tabulated below. Based on the brow ridges of the frontal bones and the external occipital protuberance of the occipital bone would indicate that at least one of

the skeletons represents a male. Due to the fragmentary condition of the pit assemblage, an estimation of the age at the time of death proves problematic. The estimation is based on the fusion of the epiphyses of the long bones as well as the fusion of the spheno-occipital synchondrosis, and suggests an age of 13 – 25 years at the time of death (White & Folkens 2000, 81: Scheuer & Black 2000, 61).

Skeletal Element	Side
Cuboid	Right
4 th Metatarsal	Left
Talus	Left
Talus	Right
Calcaneus	Left
Calcaneus	Right
4 th Metacarpal	Left
4 th Metacarpal	Right
Patella	Right
Femur	Right – Proximal ends
Tibia	Right – Proximal ends
Tibia	Left – Proximal ends (sampled for radiocarbon dating)
Radius	Right – Distal epiphysis
Humerous	Right – Proximal ends

Table 2: Duplicated skeletal elements from pit burial (based on information provided by Clare Mc Granaghan)

4.3 *The tri-partite vessel*

4.3.1 The pottery vessel recovered from the inhumation cist at Church Bay is classified as a ‘tri-partite’ vessel which falls into the classification of Irish bowls and dates to the Early Bronze Age. Bowls appear to have a general distribution in the North and East of Ireland, and most (90%) have been recovered north of an arbitrary line running from Ballysadare in County Sligo to Wexford Harbour (Waddell 1990, 5) (Figure 8).

- 4.3.2 Bowls are mainly known from funerary contexts, although they are occasionally associated with domestic activity. At Coney Island, Lough Neagh, two faint rectangular structures and a hearth were uncovered associated with sherds of a bowl vessel (Addyman 1965, 84). They are also associated with ritual activity, such as the Grange stone circle Co. Limerick, and Urbalreagh Co. Antrim (Waddell 1990, 5). A programme of radiocarbon dating Irish bowls in a funerary context has been carried out by A. Brindley in 2007. Her results indicate that the bowl tradition can be dated to between 3770 ± 70 BP and 3440 ± 70 BP, with a particular concentration between 3700 and 3550 BP (Brindley 2007, 74).
- 4.3.3 On the Church Bay example, there are two ribs on the exterior of the vessel that define three distinct zones of decoration. The ribs themselves are decorated with a false relief pattern created by half moon finger or thumbnail impressions into the wet clay. The upper and middle zones are decorated with narrow rows of comb-impressed decoration, probably executed with a fine toothed implement of bone or wood. The lowermost zone is decorated with eight crudely incised lozenge shapes, which each contain more comb-impressions. The base and interior of the pot are undecorated. (Naomi Carver pers comm.) (Figure 9).

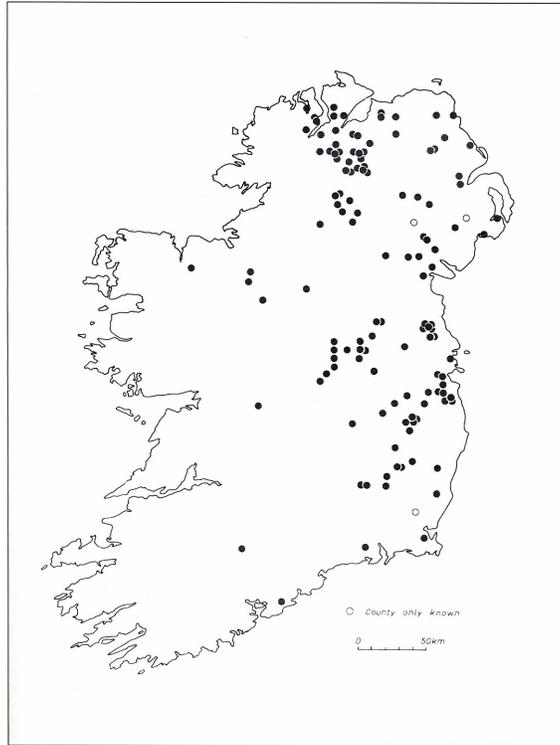


Figure 8: Distribution of tri-partite vessels (taken from O'Riordain & Waddell 1993)

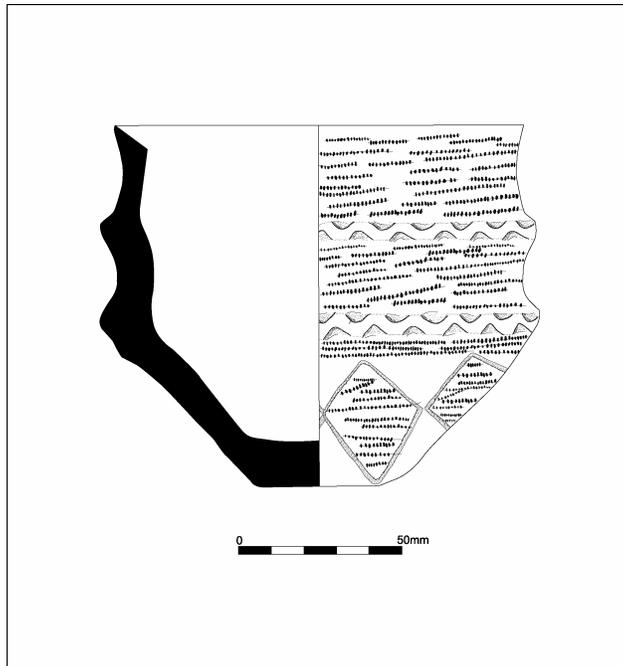


Figure 9: The tripartite food vessel recovered from the cist.

4.4 *Evidence for Bronze Age domesticity on Rathlin Island*

4.4.1 The numerous Bronze Age cist interments encountered in the Church Bay area indicate that the island was the focus for substantial burial activity in the Bronze Age. A wealth of evidence exists for Mesolithic activity and Neolithic industrial and domestic activity on the island, although our knowledge of Bronze Age domestic activity, at the time of writing, is scarce. The excavations carried out by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork on the island have demonstrated a small degree of domestic activity relating to the Bronze Age (Bronze Age pottery from Oweyberne cave). However, the question arises as to whether there was a substantial Bronze Age population on the island.

4.4.2 Mount, in his study of Early Bronze Age burial in the south-east of Ireland states:

“For ritual reasons people may have chosen sites to dispose of the dead at some distance from their homes and farms – the siting of cairns on mountain tops sometimes suggests this – but the clustering of sites ... at the lower altitudes and on the better soils does indicate significant overlap between areas of settlement and burial ... the burial sites of the Early Bronze Age were probably part and parcel of the contemporary settlement pattern ... and so the sites are particularly good indicators of the presence of that settlement. Since some close proximity between areas of settlement and burial sites seems likely, it follows that the starting point for locating the archaeological remains of Early Bronze Age habitations must be the vicinity of the burial sites of the period” (Mount 1997, 122).

4.4.3 Other discreet areas of Bronze Age material have been excavated on the island, suggesting evidence of domestic life in the Bronze Age. The path of a water service pipeline passing through the townlands of Knockans, Ballynagard and Kilpatrick was archaeologically monitored in 2003. A small deposit of charcoal flecked soil with heat shattered stone was uncovered, and although this deposit stretched beyond the area of excavation, was interpreted as the remains of a burnt mound. This was tentatively attributed to Bronze Age activity (Mc Conway and Mc Quaid 2003).

4.4.4 A late Neolithic settlement site was excavated in the Townland of Knockans by Malachy Conway in 1993 revealed some evidence for occupation of the site continuing into the Bronze Age. Sherds of both bowl and vase vessels, as well as undiagnostic coarse ware (perhaps Bronze Age in date) were recovered.

4.4.5 Fragments of decorated collared urn and pressure flaked flint points were recovered from excavations carried out in Oweyberne cave along the Island's south facing shore. These have been attributed to Bronze Age activity and may indicate a temporary or seasonal occupation of the cave (Moore 2004).

4.5 *Cists in an Irish context*

4.5.1 The excavation of the cist in Church Bay and the discovery of the secondary cist further our knowledge of Bronze Age burial practice in this area of Ireland. The cists identified in 2006, along with Kenny Wiggins' excavation in 1983 and the antiquarian evidence, suggest that the burials in Church Bay are part of a large cist cemetery. Bronze Age cist burials are prevalent in the archaeological record in Ireland. They are generally distributed all through the country, with particular concentrations in Ulster and Leinster. In Ulster, there is a concentration of cist burials in Counties Derry and Tyrone, as well as along the north Antrim coast (Figure 10).

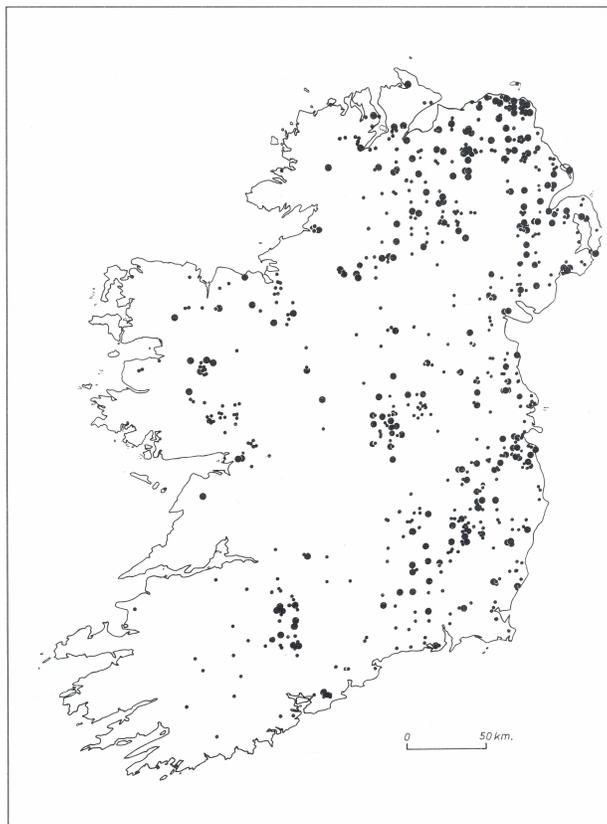


Figure 10: Distribution of Early Bronze Age cist burials (Waddell 1990, 36)

4.5.2 The distribution of cists roughly correlates with the known distribution of Bronze Age domestic sites (Figure 11). The relative lack of known Bronze Age domestic evidence from Rathlin may suggest that the island was not substantially inhabited. The correlation between burial and domestic sites in Ireland as a whole would seem to indicate that there is no reason as to why Rathlin may have been viewed a place of specific ritual importance. However, the utilisation of the porcellanite outcrop at Brockley in the Neolithic period may suggest that the island had some special significance.

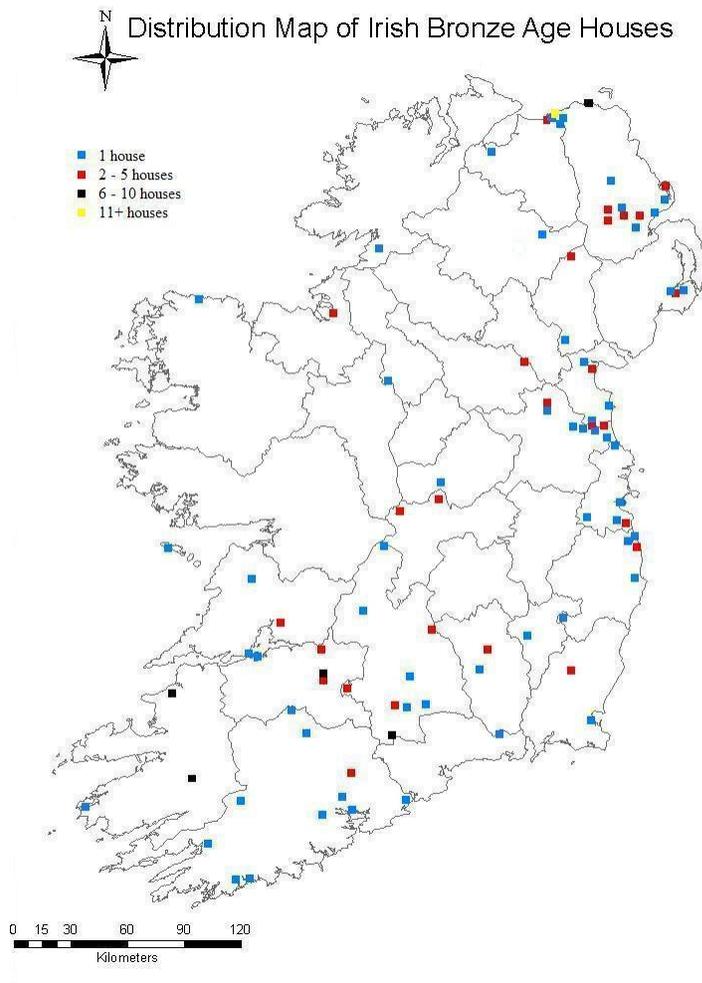


Figure 11: Distribution of known Bronze Age domestic sites. (McAuley 2007, 6).

4.6 *Cists in a wider context*

- 4.6.1 Rathlin Island lies 11 miles from the coast of the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland. Indeed, documentary evidence suggests that the ownership of the island was a point of contention between Scotland and Ireland for many centuries, cumulating in the massacre of the island's population by Campbell forces in 1642. The location of the island would indicate that it has been the focus for outside influence for millennia.
- 4.6.2 Ritchie, in his work on the archaeology of the Argyll region has highlighted some of the similarities between the cist burials of the Kintyre area and some of those found in Ulster. He states that close parallels can be drawn between the shape and decoration of several food vessels in Scotland and examples from Ulster, indicating that although the area is remote, these parallels indicate that the communities in Kintyre were "...participating fully in the ceramic traditions of Western Scotland and Ireland" (Ritchie 1997, 81).
- 4.6.3 A complexity of burial sequence is evident at some of the Scottish inhumation cists. A cist at Traigh Bhan, Islay illustrates a complex burial sequence (*ibid*, 83). The cist was used for burial on two separate occasions. Once the primary burial had become defleshed, the tomb was opened and the remains carefully deposited at one end of the cist. This was done to provide room for a second burial to be inserted into the cist, along with a food vessel. The radiocarbon dates for both burials confirm this sequence.
- 4.6.4 This re-use of the cist in Scotland has been mirrored on Rathlin. Wiggins' Grave 5 produced the remains of at least five individuals, indicating perhaps the use of the monument as a family burial site. The investigation carried out by the CAF behind Mc Cuaig's bar may also suggest something similar. The positions of the disarticulated remains in the pit above the cist prove curious. Certain elements (e.g. the vertebrae) appeared articulated in the section. It may be that an earlier burial was disturbed by the insertion of either of the cists, and the remains re-interred after the deposition of the cists. Or it could be a relatively modern burial that has been re-interred more recently following being disturbed by agricultural activity. However, the position of the pit above the cist would make this latter suggestion an incredible coincidence, along with the fact that the remains would be unlikely to preserve some sort of articulation.

4.7 *Conclusion*

- 4.7.1 The excavation behind Mc Cuaig's bar on Rathlin Island has raised several questions on Irish traditions of burial in the Bronze Age, including its relation to wider burial rites and ceramic associations. The discovery of a second cist, coupled with the information gathered during excavations in 1983 as well as antiquarian evidence, would suggest that the Church Bay area was a centre for burial and ritual for an extended period of time.
- 4.7.2 It is recommended that the post-excavation programme as detailed in section 5 of this report is implemented to bring this project to completion.

5 Recommendations for further work

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Several aspects of this excavation are suitable for further study. It is envisaged that further analysis of the skeletal remains, the pot, the flint and a series of radiocarbon dates from the skeletal remains would prove critical in gaining the maximum information from this excavation, and about the deposition of the dead in Church Bay in the Bronze Age. This further work will be important to bring the excavation of the cist burial to publication. A more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with the post-excavation work is provided in the Costed Assessment which accompanies this report.

5.2 The skeletal remains

5.2.1 It is recommended that a full analysis is carried out for the skeleton recovered from the cist and for the disarticulated human remains from the pit above the cist. Although provisional analysis has been carried out for the purpose of this report, it is envisaged that full scale cataloguing and analysis will enhance our knowledge of Bronze Age burial in this area.

5.3 Programme of radiocarbon dating

5.3.1 It is recommended that a series of radiocarbon dates from the excavated material are obtained. This will include a small bone sample from the skeleton recovered from the cist, as well as a series of small samples from the disarticulated burial. Excavation has demonstrated that more than one individual is represented by the bone assemblage from the pit, so it would be beneficial to obtain dates from more than one sample. As the new AMS machine in the Chrono Centre at Queen's University Belfast requires small samples for dating purposes, it is not thought that such a dating programme will inflict seriously on the bone assemblage.

5.4 Specialist pottery report

5.4.1 A preliminary report for the pottery vessel has been completed by Naomi Carver for the purpose of this report.

5.5 *Processing of soil samples*

5.5.1 A number of soil samples were taken during the excavation. It is recommended that these are processed and sorted to aid the completion of a publication on the excavation at Church Bay,

5.6 *Production of a publication*

5.6.1 The excavation at Church Bay merits full publication in a peer reviewed journal. Following the implementation of the recommendations made in this section, it is advised that an article be prepared for publication in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*.

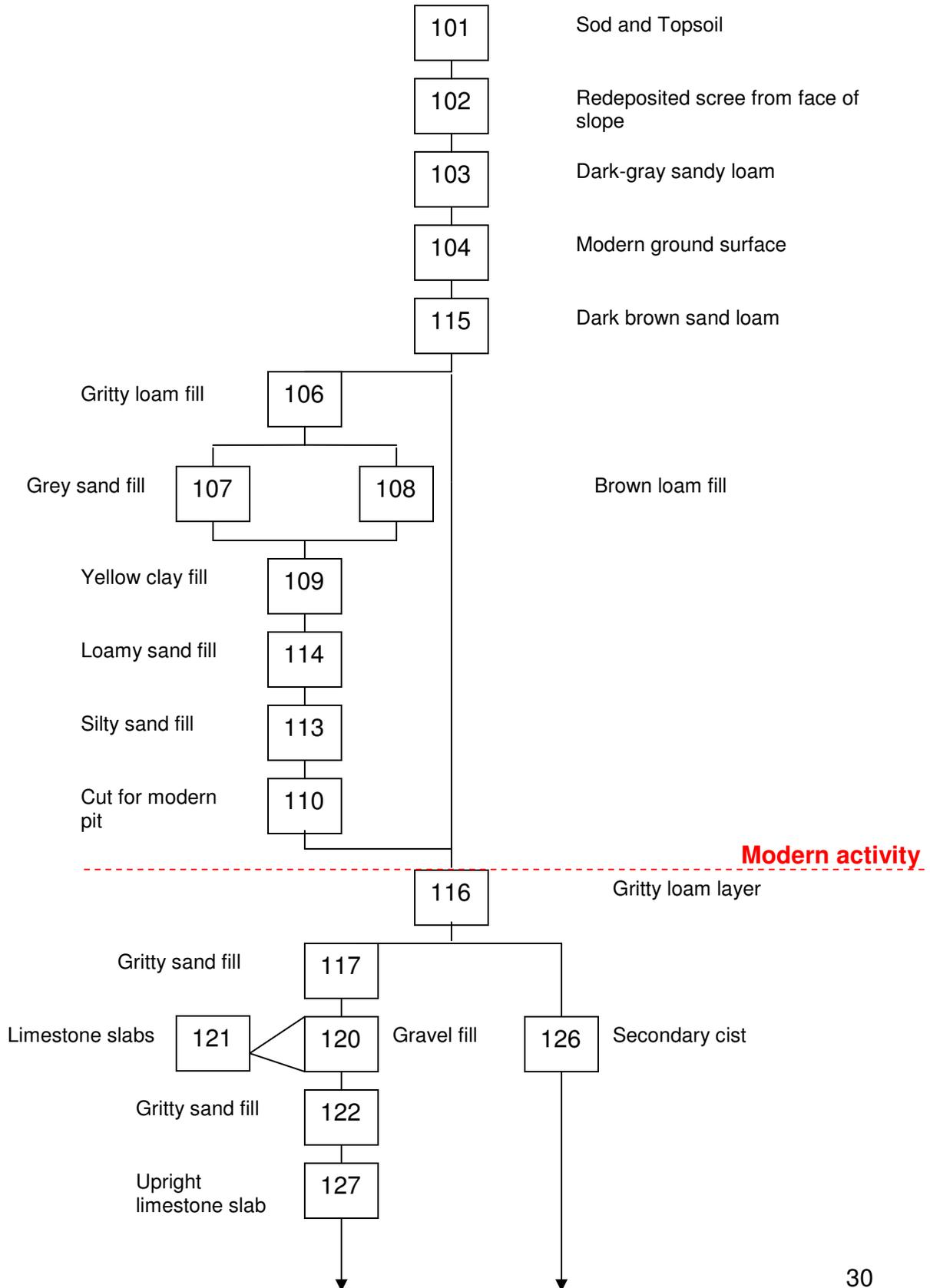
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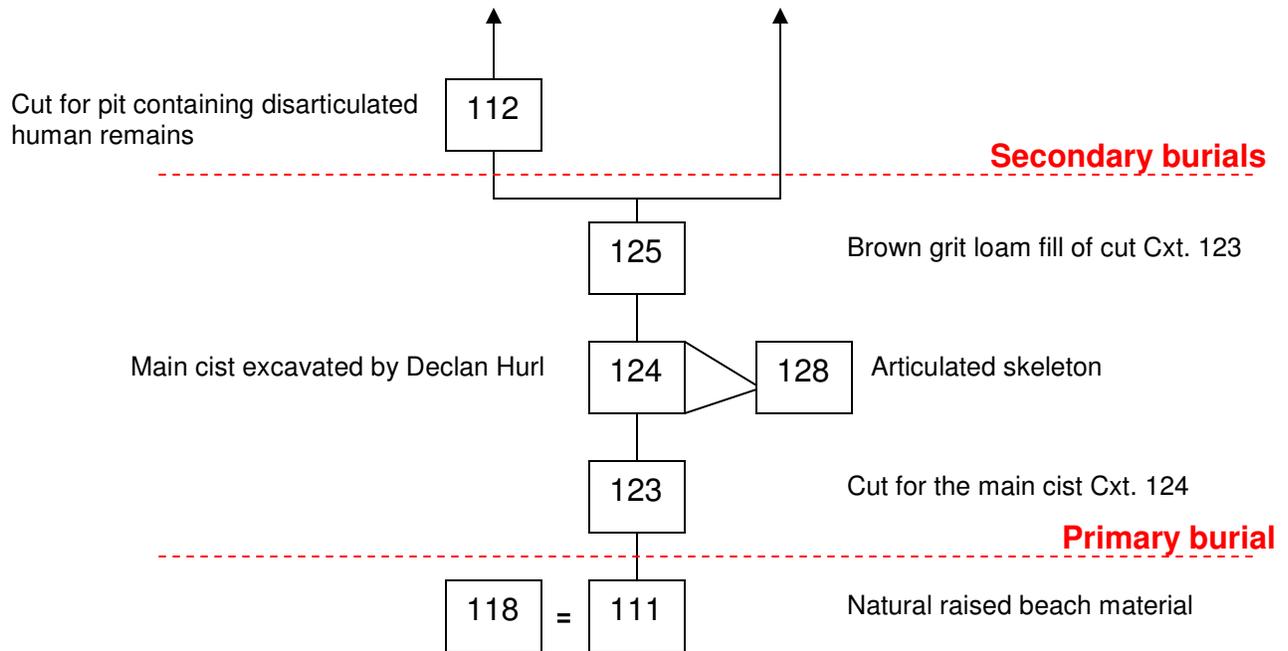
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Appendix 1: Context Record

Context	Description
101	Sandy loam beneath topsoil
102	Re-deposited scree from face of cliff
103	Dark-grey sandy loam - same as 102
104	Mid grey-brown sand
105	Dark brown sandy loam
106	Mid-brown gritty loam, fill of pit (cut 110)
107	Fill of modern pit (cut 110)
108	Fill of modern pit (cut 110)
109	Fill of modern pit (cut 110)
110	Modern pit filled by contexts 106 – 109 and 113-114
111	Scree consisting of rounded limestone and flint pebbles. Natural
112	Cut containing human remains
113	Fill of modern pit (cut 110)
114	Fill of modern pit (cut 110)
115	Dark brown sandy loam
116	Dark brown/black soil
117	Uppermost fill of pit (cut 112)
118	Re-deposited Cxt. 111 lying over cist
119	Mid-brown loamy soil
120	Fill of pit (cut 112)
121	Fill of pit (cut 112)
122	Fill of pit (cut 112)
123	Cut for main cist
124	Side lintels and capstone of main cist
125	Gritty sand and gravel fill of Cxt 123
126	Secondary cist protruding from northern section face
127	Human Remains from within the main cist Cxt. 124

Appendix two: Harris Matrix





Appendix 3: Photographic record

Digital images

- 1 Construction of scaffolding
- 2 Construction of scaffolding
- 3 Construction of scaffolding
- 4 Working shot, looking north
- 5 Working shot, looking south
- 6 N/A
- 7 N/A
- 8 Context 104, looking west
- 9 Context 104, looking north
- 10 Context 104, looking north
- 11 West-facing section (drawing no. 1)
- 12 Site looking east
- 13 Site looking east
- 14 Slipped bone, context 105, looking east
- 15 Slipped bone, context 105, looking east
- 16 Section looking south-east
- 17 Section looking north-east
- 18 Context 115 looking south
- 19 Context 115 looking north
- 20 Context 116 in box section, looking south-east
- 21 Context 116 in box section, looking south-east
- 22 Context 116 in box section, looking east
- 23 Context 116 in box section, looking east
- 24 Box section with context 116 removed, showing pit and lintel, looking west
- 25 Box section with context 116 removed, showing pit and lintel, looking west
- 26 Box section with context 116 removed, looking north
- 27 Box section with context 116 removed, showing lintel, looking north-east
- 28 Working shot
- 29 Contexts 117, 118 and 106 looking south
- 30 Contexts 117, 118 and 106 looking south
- 31 Contexts 117, 118 and 106 looking north
- 32 Contexts 117, 118 and 106 looking north

- 33 Working shot, looking north
- 34 Working shot, looking north
- 35 N/A
- 36 N/A
- 37 Context 120 (with context 117 removed), looking west
- 38 Context 120 (with context 117 removed), looking south
- 39 Context 120 (with context 117 removed), looking east
- 40 Context 120 (with context 117 removed), looking south-east
- 41 Context 121 and 122, with context 120 removed, looking west
- 42 Context 122 and disarticulated bone in-situ, looking west
- 43 Context 122 and disarticulated bone in-situ, looking east
- 44 Context 122, showing section with bone in it, looking east
- 45 Context 112 and 118, fully excavated burial cut, looking south-east
- 46 Context 112 and 118, fully excavated burial cut, looking south-east
- 47 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking north-west
- 48 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking north-west
- 49 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking north
- 50 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking north
- 51 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking south-east
- 52 Context 112, 118, fully excavated burial pit, showing cist, looking south-east
- 53 Cist looking south
- 54 Cist looking south
- 55 North-facing section showing cist and contexts 101, 102, 103
- 56 North-facing section showing cist and contexts 101, 102, 103
- 57 Close-up of capstone and side lintel of cist in north section
- 58 Detail of inside of cist
- 59 Working shot
- 60 Working shot
- 61 Working shot
- 62 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking south-east
- 63 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking south-west
- 64 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking west
- 65 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking west
- 66 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking north
- 67 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking north
- 68 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking east

- 69 Post-ex shot of context 118, looking east
- 70 Cut for cist, looking south
- 71 Cut for cist, looking south
- 72 Cut for cist, looking north
- 73 Cut for cist, looking north
- 74 Cut for cist looking south-east
- 75 Cut for cist looking south-west
- 76 Cut for cist looking north-west
- 77 Cut for cist looking north-east
- 78 Cut 123 for cist, filled by context 125 looking south
- 79 Cut 123 for cist, filled by context 125 looking south-west
- 80 Cut 123 for cist, filled by context 125 looking south-east
- 81 Cut 123 for cist, filled by context 125 looking south-east
- 82 Post-ex view of site looking south-east
- 83 Post-ex view of site looking south-south-east
- 84 Post-ex view of site looking south-west
- 85 Post-ex view of site looking south-west
- 86 Post-ex view of site looking north-west
- 87 Cist in section, showing context 126, looking south
- 88 Cist in section, showing context 126, looking south
- 89 Cist in section, showing context 126, looking south
- 90 Cist in section, showing context 126, looking south
- 91 Interior of cist, looking south-east
- 92 Interior of cist, looking south-east
- 93 Interior of cist, looking south-east
- 94 Interior of cist, looking south-east

Appendix 4: Drawing list

Drawing No.	Context No's.	Plan/Section	Description
1	101, 102, 103	Section	West-facing section showing spoil heap
2		Section	West-facing section showing area surrounding cist
3	106, 110, 112, 117, 119,	Plan	
4	106, 110, 112, 118, 120	Plan	As plan 3, with c.117 removed. Showing context 120
5	106, 118, 120, 122, 112	Plan	Over-lay of plan 4 after removal of context 120
6	112, 118, 106, 119	Plan	Fully excavated cist
7	101, 102, 103	Section	North-facing section
8		Section	South-facing section
9		Plan	Showing cist cut
10	115, 116, 117, 120, 121, 122, 106, 108, 114, 119, 110, 112	Section	Complete west-facing section

Appendix 5: Small Finds Register

Small Find #	Context	Description	Quantity	Comment
1	102	Flint flake	1	
2	102	Flint core	1	
3	102	Flint	1	
4	102	Glass	1	
5	102	Flint flake	1	
6	102	Flint flake	1	
7	102	Flint flake	1	
8	103	Flint core	1	
9	103	Flint flake	1	
10	102	Metal?	1	
11	103	Glass	1	
12	103	Metal?	2	
13	103	Glass	1	
14	102	Flint flake	1	
15	102	Flint	1	
16	102	Flint	1	
17	102	Flint	1	
18	102	Flint	1	
19	102	Ceramic	1	White glazed ceramic fragment
20	102	Glass	1	
21	102	Glass	1	
22	105	Flint	1	
23	102	Ceramic	1	Blackware
24	102	Flint	1	
25	103	Glass	1	
26	103	Glass	1	
27	104	Plastic	1	
28	104	Metal beer tin	1	
29	104	Metal beer tin	1	
30	104	Metal beer tin	1	
31	104	Flint	1	
32	109	Glass	1	
33	104	Bone	1	Possibly human
34	104	Ceramic	2	White glazed ceramic fragments
35	104	Flint flake	1	
36	104	Flint flake	1	
37	104	Animal tooth	1	
38	104	Flint	1	
39	104	Flint flake	1	
40	104	Flint flake	1	
41	104	Flint	1	
42	104	Flint	1	
43	104	Flint	1	
44	115	Flint	1	

Small Find #	Context	Description	Quantity	Comment
45	115	Flint	1	
46	115	Ceramic	1	Transfer printed ceramic
47	115	Flint	1	
48	115	Flint	1	
49	115	Flint	1	
50	115	Plastic	1	
51	118	Flint	1	
52	105	Pebble	1	
53	105	Coal?	2	
54	105	Flint	2	
55	106	Glass	1	
56	106	Flint	2	
57	106	Metal nail	1	
58	115	Clay pipe stem	1	
59	115	Metal	1	
60	115	Brick	1	
61	115	Ceramic	2	White glazed ceramic fragments
62	115	Ceramic	1	White glazed ceramic fragments
63	115	Coal?	1	
64	115	Glass	6	
65	115	Ceramic	2	Blackware
66	115	Bone	4	Possibly human
67	115	Flint	38	
68	116	Flint	23	
69	116	Flint	1	
70	116	Glass	1	
71	116	Bone	2	
72	116	Metal nail	1	
73	122	Bone	2	
74	122	Flint	8	
75	122	Flint	1	
76	122	Shell	3	Winkle shells
77	122	Bone	1	Animal bone
78	122	Shell	4	Winkle shells
79	122	Flint	4	
80	125	Flint	1	
81	Unstratified	Flint	1	
82	Topsoil	Flint	12	From initial investigation of cist
83	Base of cist	Stone	1	From initial investigation of cist
84	Base of cist	Stone	1	From initial investigation of cist

Small Find #	Context	Description	Quantity	Comment
85	Base of cist	Flint	16	From initial investigation of cist
86	Base of cist	Flint	1	From initial investigation of cist
87	Base of cist	Stone	2	From initial investigation of cist

Appendix 6: Sample List

Sample No.	Context No.	No. of Bags	Description/ reason for sampling
1	105	4	Fragments of human bone (including teeth)
2	105	6	Fragments of human bone (including teeth)
3	117	2	Top of burial deposit , sampled to retrieve small bone fragments
4	122	4	Deposit containing bones
5	125	3	Fill of cist cut 123



Plate 1: The location of the cist prior to the second investigation, looking north-east.



Plate 2: Construction of the scaffolding, looking north-east.



Plate 3: Original ground surface (Context No. 104) following removal of scree overburden (Context Nos. 101, 102 and 103), looking south-west.



Plate 4: Section view of scree overburden (Context Nos. 101, 102 and 103), looking east.

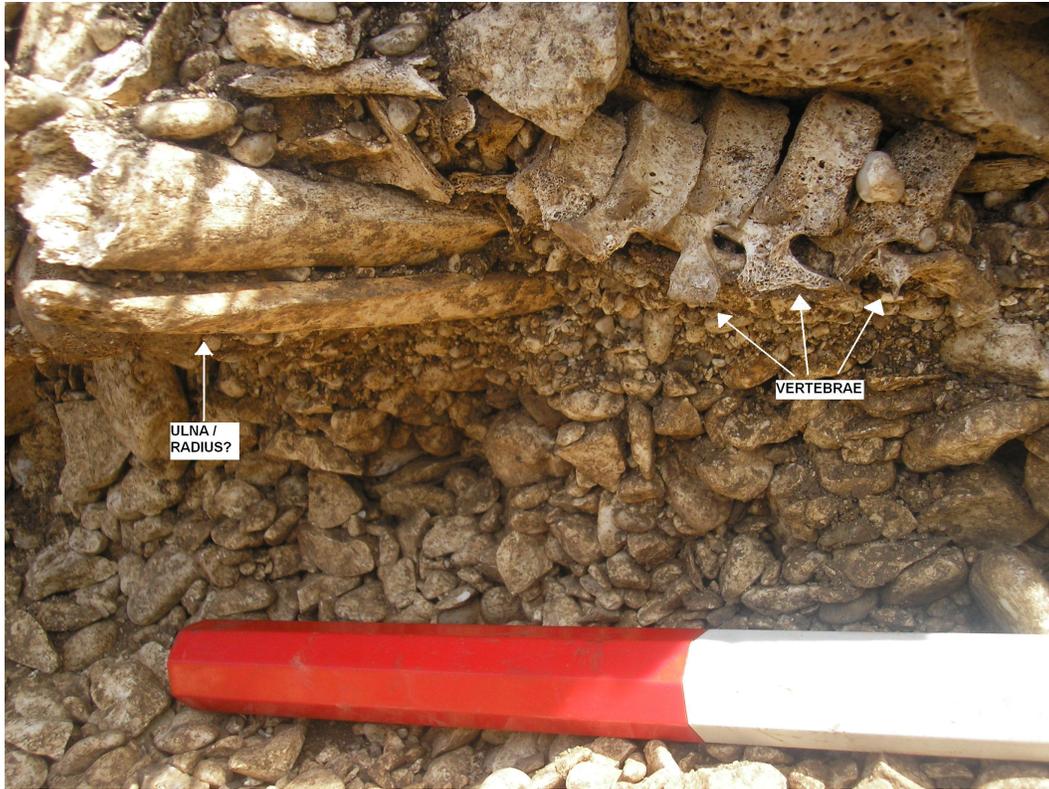


Plate 5: Possible articulated human remains visible on section face prior to the excavation.



Plate 6: Human bone eroding from the west facing section.



Plate 7: View of west facing section showing pit containing the disarticulated human remains.



Plate 8: Limestone slabs (Context No. 120) within pit cut (Context No. 112), looking west.



Plate 9: *In situ* disarticulated human remains showing upright limestone slab (Context No. 127), looking west.



Plate 10: North facing section showing secondary cist (Context No. 126), looking south.



Plate 11: Post excavation shot of trench showing cut for cist (Context No. 123), looking southwest.

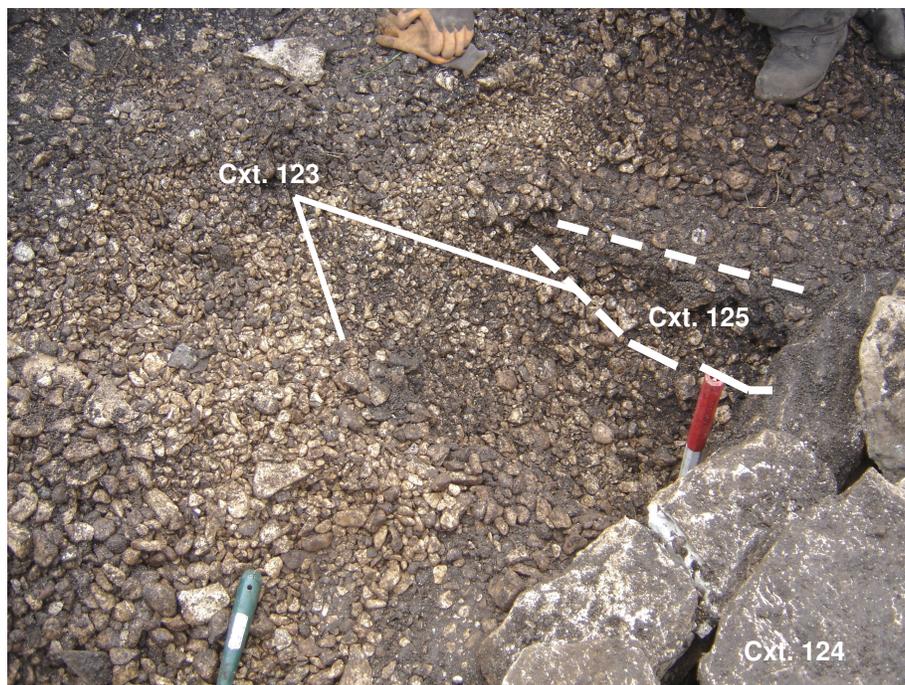


Plate 12: Box section through cist cut (Context No. 123) showing fill (Context No. 125) and side lintel of cist (Context No. 124), looking south.