

St Bartholomew's Church Ducklington Oxfordshire



Archaeological Watching Brief Report



March 2013

**Client: Ducklington Parochial
Church Council**

Issue No: 1
OA Job No: 5571
NGR: SP 35918 07628



Client Name: Ducklington Parochial Church Council
Client Ref No:
Document Title: St Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington, Oxfordshire
Document Type: Archaeological Watching Brief Report
Issue/Version Number: 1
Grid Reference: SP 35918 07628
Planning Reference:
Invoice Code: DUCBATWB
OA Job Number: 5571
Site Code: DUCBAT13
Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum Service
Museum Accession No.: (Awaiting)
Event No.:

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Document File Location: \\Samba-1\smallworks\PROJECTS\Oxfordshire OX\West Oxfordshire
WO\St Bartholomew's, Ducklington
Graphics File Location: file:///Servergo/invoice%20codes%20a%20thru%20h/D_invoice
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St Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between 11th and 12th March 2013, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington (NGR 35918 07628). The monitored groundworks involved the excavation of a sump for a septic tank, in the western part of the graveyard, on the south side of the church tower. Aside from a quantity of disarticulated human bone, a total of 12 inter-cutting, in situ burials were revealed. Of the 12 skeletons, four were juveniles and eight were adults. The presence of coffin fittings, which included nails, upholstery studs, grips and coffin lace, indicated that these were post-medieval in date. Buttons and a shroud pin, indicative of funerary attire, were present in two burials.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 In March 2013 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Ducklington Parochial Church Council to carry out an archaeological watching brief on groundworks at St Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington, Oxfordshire (Fig.1).
- 1.1.2 The archaeological watching brief was carried out in response to a Faculty issued by the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Oxford, which imposed the need for archaeological monitoring of the works.
- 1.1.3 The archaeologically monitored groundworks involved the excavation of an approximately 1.2 m square, 2.4 m deep sump for a septic tank, associated with the installation of a new toilet within the church tower. The sump was located in the churchyard, to the south side of the tower, between the tower wall and the west wall of the southern aisle (Fig. 2).
- 1.1.4 The groundworks also included the machine excavation of a service trench from the sump, running south-west across the graveyard, to link with a manhole in the road. This trench was approximately 0.3 m wide and just 0.5 m in depth. Due to the shallow depth of this trench, and in keeping with the requirements of the Faculty, archaeological monitoring was not required.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 St Bartholomew's Church is located on Church Street in the village of Ducklington, West Oxfordshire (NGR 35918 07628). The underlying natural geology of the area is floodplain terrace gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Ducklington was one of the first Saxon parishes to be recorded in Oxfordshire. It is featured in the 958 Charter of King Edgar the Peaceable, granting land to his minister Eanulf (St Bartholomew's Church, 2012). The name 'Ducklington' has been translated as Ducel's Farm or as 'The farm of the sons of Docca'. An "old wayside cross" is mentioned in the 958 charter (*ibid.*).
- 1.3.2 Following the Norman Conquest, Ducklington was in the possession of Robert d'Oily, friend of William I and builder of Oxford Castle and Osney Abbey (St Bartholomew's Church, 2012). The earliest part of the church dates from this time. The present plan of the church was established during the 12th century (apart from the chancel, which was



added a little later) (*ibid.*). However, changes (particularly to the doors and windows) were made during the 13th century, and major development of the north aisle was undertaken in the first half of the 14th century. The tower dates from the 15th century (*ibid.*).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The principal aims of the work were to:

- (i) To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the area affected by the groundworks.
- (ii) To provide a full illustrative, photographic and written record of any archaeological deposits encountered, including articulated burials.
- (iii) To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The sump was mechanically excavated under close archaeological supervision, using a 1.5 tonne mini excavator fitted with a 1.2 m wide toothless bucket. Mechanical excavation proceeded in spits down to the archaeological deposits (burials).

2.2.2 All archaeological deposits (burials) were excavated by hand. All excavation, recording and lifting of human remains was undertaken in accordance with the methods detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson 1992).

2.2.3 In order to comply with OA's health and safety policies, it was necessary to mitigate the depth of the sump to allow for the proper archaeological recording of deposits that lay beyond 1 m below ground level. This was done by battering the edges of the sump. This did not impact upon any *in situ*, archaeological deposits.

2.2.4 In line with standard practice (BABAO 2010), every component of each burial encountered was assigned a unique context number. These comprised a grave cut number, a skeleton number, a coffin number (where encountered), a backfill number, and a grave group number. The latter number is used to group together all associated components of a burial.

2.2.5 The level of each burial encountered was measured as a depth below ground level. In the following description of deposits, the depths are also given as metres above Ordnance Datum (OD). This was calculated using a benchmark on the south wall of the church tower with a known height of 79.95 m OD, and its height above ground level (0.57 m).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (Figs 3 - 7)

3.1.1 The topsoil (011) in the area of excavation was between 0.12 m and 0.23 m deep. Following the removal of the turf and topsoil, the general graveyard soil (012) was revealed. This comprised a fairly loose, light grey-brown sandy silt, with frequent stone/gravel inclusions.

3.1.2 Through this graveyard soil, a total of 12 inter-cutting burials (grave group numbers 005, 010, 016, 021, 026, 030, 034, 038, 042, 046, 050 and 054) were revealed. The



shallowest skeleton (002, part of grave group 005) lay at c. 1.0 m below ground level (78.38 m OD) and the deepest (040, part of grave group 042) lay at 1.64 m below ground level (77.74 m OD). This gives a c. 0.64 m wide 'burial horizon'.

- 3.1.3 All burials were orientated with heads approximately to the west and feet to the east, in keeping with Christian tradition. Four of the graves contained juvenile skeletons (grave groups 005, 016, 021 and 038) and eight contained adults (grave groups 010, 026, 030, 034, 042, 046, 050 and 054). The skeletons are discussed further below (Section 3.2).
- 3.1.4 A total of five burials (grave groups 005, 010, 021, 026 and 042) had evidence for coffins (003, 008, 019, 024 and 055 respectively) in the form of iron nails, fragments of coffin lace and grip plates, a grip, upholstery studs and wood staining. These are discussed further below (Section 3.3). The presence of these coffin remains indicates that the burials are post-medieval in date.
- 3.1.5 Not surprisingly, given that the graves would have been backfilled with the up-cast from the grave digging process, most of the grave backfills (004, 009, 015, 020, 025, 029, 033, 037 and 041) were very similar in composition to the graveyard soil (012) through which they were cut. That said, the edges of the grave cuts were fairly well defined in most cases because the backfills were slightly looser.
- 3.1.6 The deepest three graves (grave groups 046, 050 and 054) had fills (045, 049 and 053 respectively) that were less grey in colour, with higher gravel contents. This is undoubtedly the result of these graves having been cut down into the natural gravel (056), and subsequently backfilled with the same material following the interment.
- 3.1.7 Given the limited dimensions of the sump (1.2 m square) and the inter-cutting nature of the burials, it is not surprising that none of the graves were revealed in their entirety. That said, of the partial graves revealed, it seems likely that most, if not all, would have been sub-rectangular in shape. The sides of the graves were generally vertical, as depicted in Figure 7, which shows the south facing section of the sump.
- 3.1.8 Beyond the base of the deepest grave (Grave group 042) at 1.64 m below ground level (77.74 m OD), the base of the sump comprised undisturbed, yellow-brown natural gravel (056). Small areas of undisturbed natural were observable between grave cuts as high as 1.0 m below ground level (78.38 m OD).

3.2 The burials – human remains (Plates 1 - 10)

Methodology

- 3.2.1 Osteological recording was undertaken during excavation, by a qualified osteoarchaeologist. Articulated skeletons were rapidly scanned to estimate age and sex and, where possible, to estimate stature. Pathological lesions that were observed during the rapid analysis were also noted. Disarticulated human bone was collected for reburial but not analysed. All recording was undertaken in accordance with standard guidelines (Brickley and McKinley 2004).

Results

- 3.2.2 A summary of the osteological data recorded on site is given in Table 1.



Table 1. Summary of osteological data – articulated skeletons.

Grave group no.	Skeleton no.	Completeness (as revealed in sump)	Condition grade (McKinley 2004)	Age	Sex	Stature (bone measured)	Observations/pathology
005	002	0-25%	2 (5+)	Young child (2-3 yrs)	/		Long bone preservation good, torso poor
010	007	26-50%	2	Prime adult (26-35 yrs)	M		
016	014	0-25%	1	Young child (2-5 yrs)	/		
021	018	51-75%	2 (5+)	Older child (7-12 yrs)	/		Long bone preservation good, torso poor
026	023	26-50%	2	Prime adult (26-35 yrs)	M	160.2 m (R fem)	
030	028	0-25%	1	Adult unspecified ? (>18 yrs)	?		
034	032	0-25%	1	Adult unspecified (>18 yrs)	?		
038	036	26-30%	1	Adolescent (13-17 yrs)	/		
042	040	0-25%	5+	?Adult unspecified (>18 yrs)	?		Very poor preservation – largely bone staining
046	044	26-50%	1	Mature adult (36-45 yrs)	F	167.7 m (L fem)	
050	048	76-100%	1	Young - prime adult (21-35 yrs)	?F		
054	052	26-50%	1	?Older adult (>45 yrs)	?F		Pathology: ante-mortem tooth loss; marginal osteophytes (vertebral bodies)

3.2.3 A total of 12 articulated skeletons were revealed during the watching brief. In general, skeletons were fairly incomplete. Five skeletons were less than 25% complete, five were between 26% and 50% complete, one was between 51% and 75% complete, and one was over 75% complete. Whilst inter-cutting of graves and subsequent truncation of skeletons was in part, the cause of incompleteness, it should be noted that the true completeness of the skeletons could not be assessed because most extended beyond the limits of the excavation.



- 3.2.4 Most skeletons were in good condition, with most having been assigned condition Grade 1 or 2. This means that most bones exhibited only slight, patchy surface erosion, or in some cases slightly deeper erosion (McKinley 2004, 16). Skeleton 040 exhibited the worst preservation, with the majority of the skeleton represented by only a stain. Tiny fragments of the humeral and femoral shafts were observable *in situ*, but did not survive lifting. Two skeletons, 002 and 018, exhibited variable preservation levels. The long bones were well preserved (Grade 2) but the torso regions were very badly preserved, represented by bone staining and tiny bone fragments only. The reason for this was unclear, but it may relate to these individuals having been juvenile. Juvenile bones are generally thinner and more fragile than adult bones, and often survive less well (Mays 1998, 21). Certainly, the bones of the torso (ribs, vertebrae, pelvis) are more susceptible to degradation than the long bones, which have thicker, dense cortical bone. Juvenile Skeleton 014 was represented by just the lower legs and feet, so it was not possible to comment upon the preservation of the torso region.
- 3.2.5 Of the 12 skeletons, four were juvenile, ranging from as young as 2 to 3 years (Skeleton 002) to adolescent (13 – 17 years, Skeleton 36). Of the eight adults, one was a young or prime adult (21 – 35 years, Skeleton 48), two were prime adults (26 – 35 years, Skeletons 007 and 023), one was a mature adult (36 – 45 years, Skeleton 44), and one was an older adult (over 45 years, Skeleton 052). In three cases (Skeletons 028, 032 and 040), it was not possible to estimate a more specific age than 'over 18 years'.
- 3.2.6 It was possible to estimate sex in five of the skeletons. Two skeletons (007 and 023) were estimated to be male, and three were female (044, 048 and 052).
- 3.2.7 An estimation of stature was made for two skeletons that had complete femora available for measurement. Prime adult male skeleton 023 had an estimated stature of 160.2 cm (c. 5 feet 3 inches). This is almost 11 cm shorter than the average male stature for the post-medieval period (Roberts and Cox 2003, 308). Mature adult female skeleton 044 had an estimated stature of 167.7 cm (c. 5 feet 6 inches), which is almost 8 cm taller than the average for the period (*ibid.*, 308).
- 3.2.8 Very few lesions of pathology were observed in the skeletal assemblage and, perhaps not surprisingly, those observed were in older adult skeleton 052. The majority of the molars (the back teeth) were missing, having been lost ante-mortem. The sockets were very well remodelled indicating that they had probably been lost a long time before death. Ante-mortem tooth loss can result from a multitude of factors, including trauma or deliberate extraction, severe periodontal disease secondary to calculus (mineralised plaque) formation, and pulp exposure and abscess formation secondary to caries or severe attrition. It is generally considered a degenerative disease process (Hillson 1986, 312).
- 3.2.9 Skeleton 052 also exhibited marginal osteophytosis in the spine. Nodules of new bone (osteophytes) can form around the margins of the vertebral bodies, and these may cause stiffness and intermittent aching in the affected region of the spine (Roberts and Manchester 1995, 107). Osteophytosis is an extremely common pathological condition, both spinal and extra-spinal, and is associated with increasing age (Rogers and Waldron 1995, 20).

A note on the disarticulated human bone

- 3.2.10 A fairly large quantity (three plastic crates) of disarticulated human bone was recovered during the watching brief. This came from the general graveyard soil (012) and



comprised a mixture of skeletal elements (cranial and post-cranial), and included both adult and juvenile remains.

3.3 Coffins and coffin fittings

A background to post-medieval coffins

- 3.3.1 By 1700-20 the funeral furnishing trade was a firmly established business, providing fittings for all classes of people and at various costs, depending on the status of the wealth of the deceased (Litten 1991). The financial investment in funerary panoply grew over the course of the 18th century, reaching its zenith in the 1840s. Even amongst the poor the importance of providing a decent burial was keenly felt (May 2000).
- 3.3.2 Single-break coffins (the modern ‘coffin shape’) become ubiquitous from the 1730s onwards (Litten 1991). Simple coffins comprised of a single thickness wooden case decorated with few fittings. More elaborate coffins were constructed either of a double thickness of wood; an outer wooden case and inner lead shell; a lead shell and inner wooden coffin; or a triple layer of a wood-lead-wood. Lead was the most common metal, but iron and zinc were also occasionally used for the metal shell.
- 3.3.3 From the late 18th century onwards it became customary to cover the coffin with upholstery and to decorate the lid and side panels with studs (usually iron or brass), often arranged in elaborate patterns. Metal coffin fittings, such as escutcheons, lid motifs and *departum* plates (breastplates, footplates and headplates inscribed with the name of the deceased, their age, date of death and other particulars) would also adorn the outside of the coffins.
- 3.3.4 The number and materials used for the fittings was eloquent of the wealth and hence, status, of the deceased and family. Considerable variation may be observed across the classes of Georgian and Victorian society. However, it is important to note that even the more humble went to considerable pains to bury their loved ones with as many accoutrements as they could afford.

Evidence for at St Bartholomew's Church

3.3.5 Table 2 provides a summary of the evidence for coffins.

Table 2. Evidence for coffins

Grave group no.	Coffin no.	Evidence
005	003	x15 iron nails, x2 fragments of decorative, silvered tin(?) coffin lace, decayed fabric fragments, 6 upholstery studs, decayed wood.
010	008	x3 iron nails
021	019	x8 iron nails, fragment of decorative, silvered tin(?) coffin lace, wood staining
026	024	x11 iron nails, x3 small tacks/screws(?), x20 upholstery studs, iron grip
042	055	x1 iron nail, multiple fragments of thin, plate iron (?grip plate fragments)

- 3.3.6 In all cases, corroded iron nails were recovered. Smaller iron tacks, or possibly screws, were recovered from burial 026.
- 3.3.7 Only two coffins had preserved wood. In coffin 003 (Grave group 005, juvenile skeleton 002), small areas of decayed wood were present. This, in conjunction with the multiple



iron nails that remained in situ, allowed for very rough dimensions of the coffin to be measured (c. 0.93 m long by 0.25 m wide). However, not enough survived to enable an estimate of coffin shape to be made. This was also the case for coffin 019 (Grave group 021, juvenile skeleton 018), the approximate dimensions of which, were 1.04 m+ long (the foot end of this burial extended beyond the eastern baulk) by 0.36 m wide.

- 3.3.8 Only one grip was recovered from the *in-situ* burials (grave group 026). This was undecorated and identical to Type 2a from Christ Church Spitalfields (CCS) (Reeve and Adams 1993). It should be noted that two further grips, attached to grip plates, were recovered from the general graveyard soil layer (012). These were heavily eroded so it was difficult to identify whether any decoration was present, but the shape of the grips and grip plates were similar to types seen at St Luke's (OLR grip Type 4 and grip plate Type 1) (OA, no date).
- 3.3.9 Multiple, thin fragments of corroded iron plate were recovered from along the northern edge of burial 042. These may represent grip plate fragments, although no grips were recovered. Alternatively, they may have formed some kind of decorative metal work along the side of the coffin. Indeed, two coffins, 003 and 019 (grave groups 005 and 021) had fragments of coffin lace – thin (7 mm wide) strips of silver coloured metal (probably silvered tin) with embossed and punched decoration. The pattern appeared the same in both coffins and included a scroll pattern with rows of small, punched holes along the edges of the metal strips (Plate 11).
- 3.3.10 In coffin 003 (Grave group 005) six iron upholstery studs and multiple small fragments of fabric were preserved, in association with the fragments of decayed wood. A total of 20 upholstery studs were recovered from coffin 024 (Grave group 026), although no fabric had survived in this burial.

Other burial-related artefacts

- 3.3.11 Two burials revealed evidence for funerary attire, in the form of buttons and a shroud pin.
- 3.3.12 In Grave group 005 two buttons were recovered (Plate 12). One of these was white in colour, probably made from glass, and measured approximately 11 mm in diameter. The edge of the button had a frill-like pattern. The other button was larger (c. 17 mm in diameter), undecorated and probably made from animal bone. Skeleton 002, with which these buttons were associated, was very poorly preserved, so it is not possible to state exactly where on the body they were situated, but they were recovered from the lower torso/pelvis region.
- 3.3.13 Another button, identical in style and size to the bone button described above, was recovered from the left pelvic region of Skeleton 018 (Grave group 021). A copper alloy shroud pin was also recovered from the pelvic region of this individual.

3.4 Environmental remains

- 3.4.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief on the excavation of the sump revealed 12 inter-cutting, *in situ* burials. No other archaeological features were encountered.



- 4.1.2 All burials were aligned with heads to the west and feet to the east, in keeping with Christian tradition. There was no evidence that this part of the cemetery was reserved for a specific demographic, with the burials comprising a mixture of juveniles and adults, males and females.
- 4.1.3 Five of the burials had evidence for coffins, indicative of a post-medieval date, probably late 18th to 19th century. Of the burials without evidence for coffins, it is not possible to say whether the individuals had been buried without them, or if remains of the coffins simply did not survive (for example, due to severe truncation of the graves). However, it seems likely that all burials are roughly contemporaneous, particularly given that all burials encountered were situated within a fairly narrow horizon.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Thickness / depth below GL	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
001	Cut		0.32 m	1.3 m	Grave cut		Post-med
002	Skeleton	1.0 m BGL			Juvenile skeleton		"
003	Coffin				Coffin		"
004	Fill				Grave backfill	Buttons	"
005	Group				Grave group (001-004)		"
006	Cut		0.24 m +	0.7 m +	Grave cut		"
007	Skeleton	1.1 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
008	Coffin				Coffin		"
009	Fill				Grave backfill		"
010	Group				Grave group (006-009)		"
011	Layer	0.1-0.2 m			Topsoil		"
012	Layer	c. 1.7 m			Graveyard soil		"
013	Cut		0.14 m +	0.13 m +	Grave cut		"
014	Skeleton	1.16 m BGL			Juvenile skeleton		"
015	Fill				Grave backfill		"
016	Group				Grave group (013-015)		"
017	Cut		0.43 m	1.1 m +	Grave cut		"
018	Skeleton	1.12 m BGL			Juvenile skeleton		"
019	Coffin				Coffin		"
020	Fill				Grave backfill	Button, shroud pin	"
021	Group				Grave group (017-020)		"
022	Cut		0.47 m	0.73 m +	Grave cut		"
023	Skeleton	1.27 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
024	Coffin				Coffin		"
025	Fill				Grave backfill		"
026	Group				Grave group (022-025)		"
027	Cut		0.21 m +	0.59 m +	Grave cut		"
028	Skeleton	1.35 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
029	Fill				Grave backfill		"
030	Group				Grave group (027-029)		"
031	Cut		0.44 m	0.58 m +	Grave cut		"
032	Skeleton	1.47 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
033	Fill				Grave backfill		"
034	Group				Grave group (031-033)		"
035	Cut		0.25 m +	0.37 m +	Grave cut		"
036	Skeleton	1.3 m BGL			Juvenile skeleton		"
037	Fill				Grave backfill		"
038	Group				Grave group (035-037)		"
039	Cut		0.18 m +	1.2 m +	Grave cut		"
040	Skeleton	1.64 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
041	Fill				Grave backfill		"
042	Group				Grave group (039-055)		"
043	Cut		0.36 m	1.12 m +	Grave cut		"
044	Skeleton	1.56 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
045	Fill				Grave backfill		"
046	Group				Grave group (043-045)		"
047	Cut		0.39 m +	1.2 m +	Grave cut		"
048	Skeleton	1.6 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"
049	Fill				Grave backfill		"
050	Group				Grave group (047-049)		"
051	Cut		0.4 m +	0.44 m +	Grave cut		"
052	Skeleton	1.62 m BGL			Adult skeleton		"



Context	Type	Thickness / depth below GL	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
053	Fill				Grave backfill		Post-med
054	Group				Grave group (051-053)		"
055	Coffin				Part of Grave group 042		"
056	Layer	0.75 m +			Natural		

GL = ground level



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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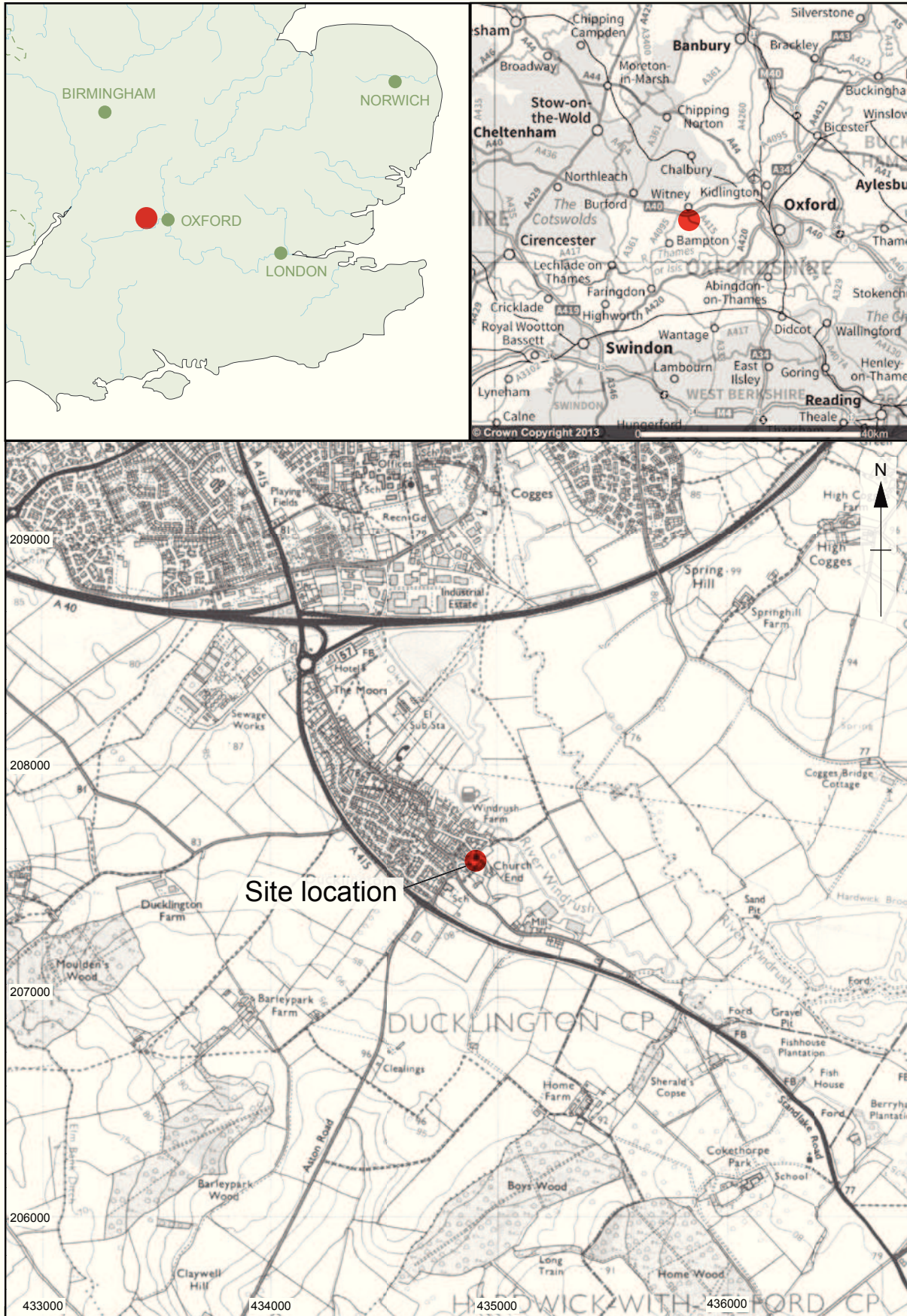
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APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	St Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington, Oxfordshire
Site code:	DUCBAT13
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 35918 07628
Type of watching brief:	Archaeological excavation and recording of <i>in situ</i> burials revealed during machine excavation of a sump for a septic tank in the western part of the cemetery, on the south side of the tower.
Date and duration of project:	Watching brief carried out 11 th - 12 th March 2013
Area of site:	c. 1.2 m ²
Summary of results:	12 <i>in situ</i> , inter-cutting post-medieval burials revealed during excavation of sump. Of these, 5 burials had evidence for coffins.
Location of archive:	Archive to be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service (Accession no. to be confirmed).



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Figure 1: Site location

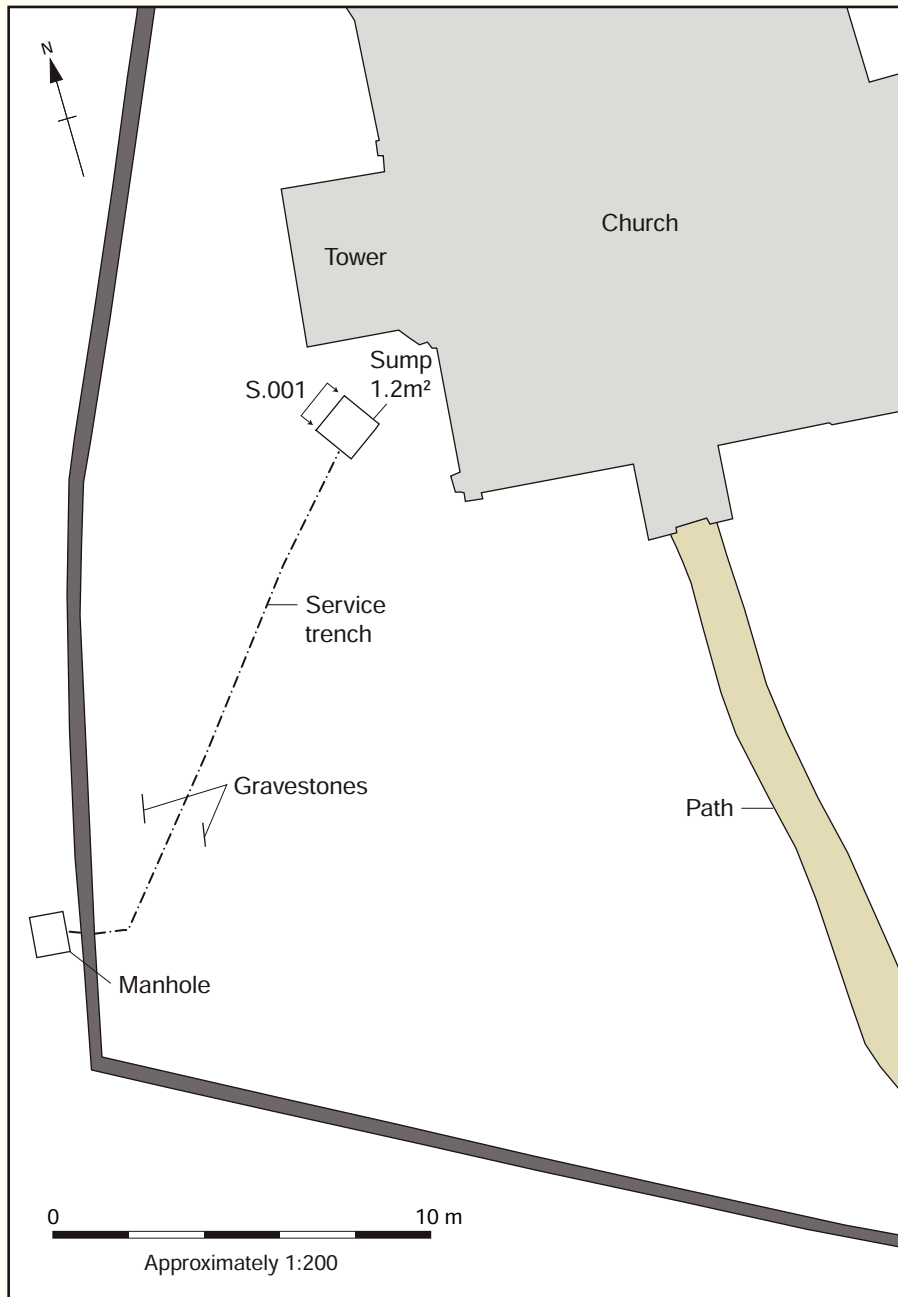


Figure 2: Location of sump in western area of graveyard

Plan 1

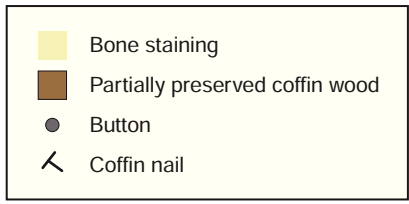
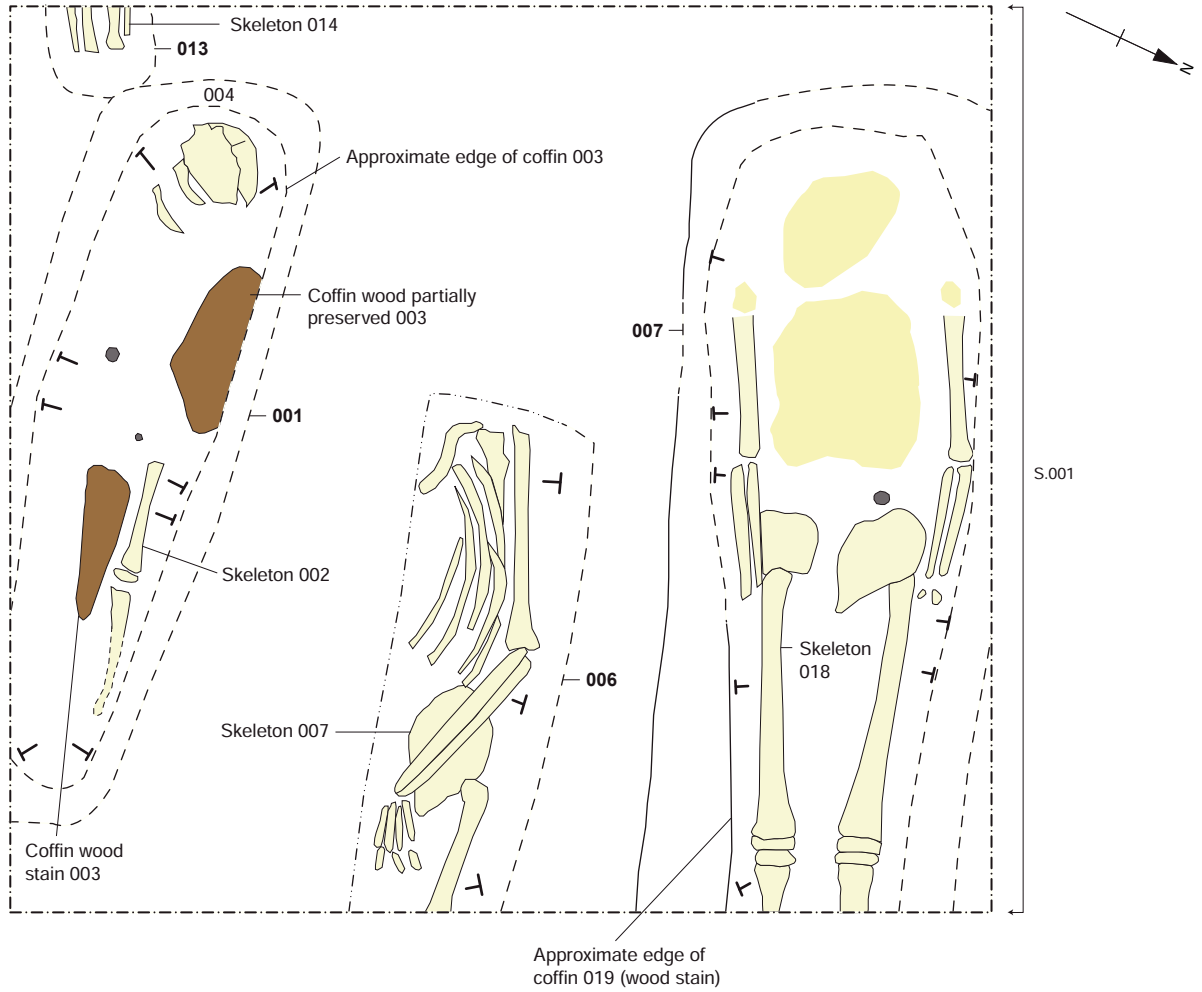


Figure 3: Plan 1

Plan 2

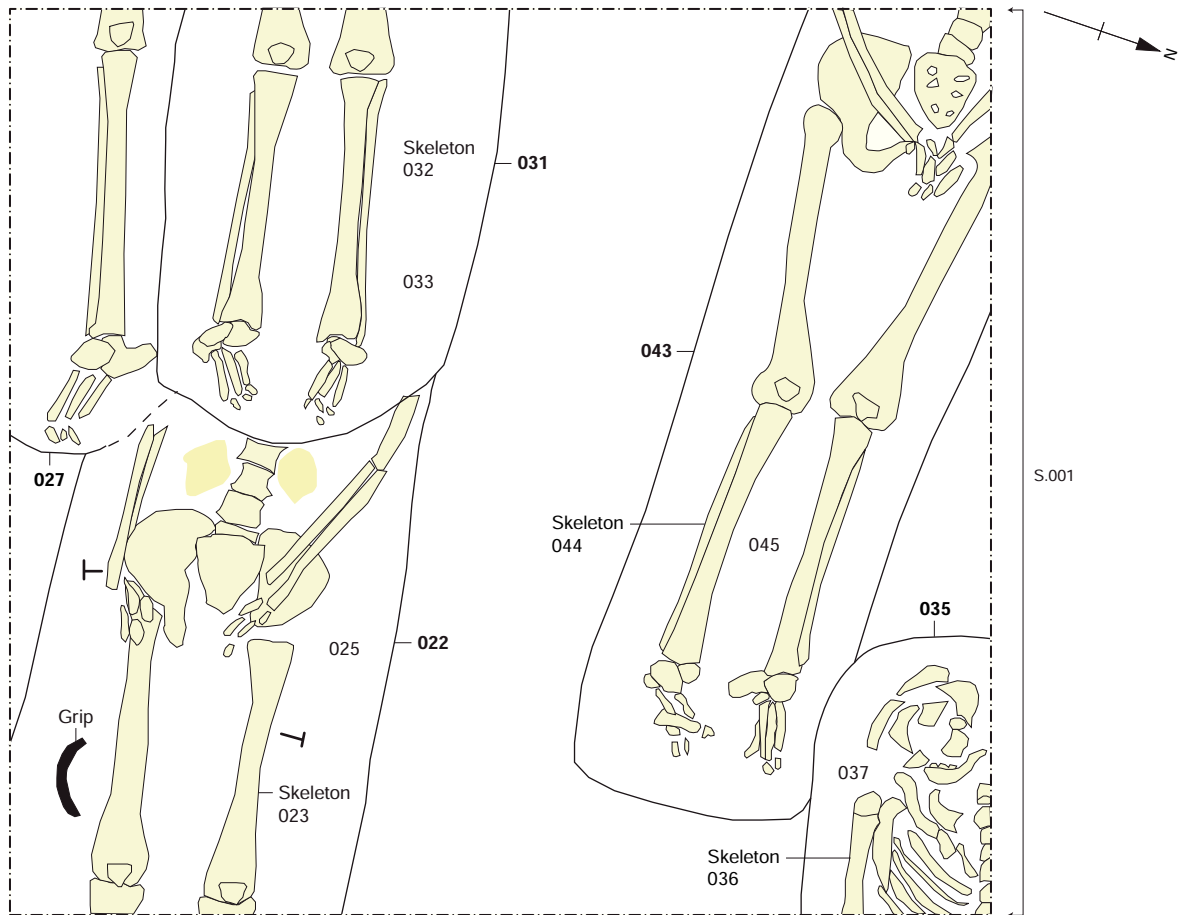


Figure 4: Plan 2 (underlay to Plan 1)

Plan 3

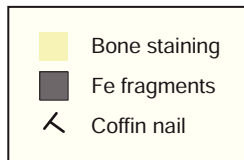
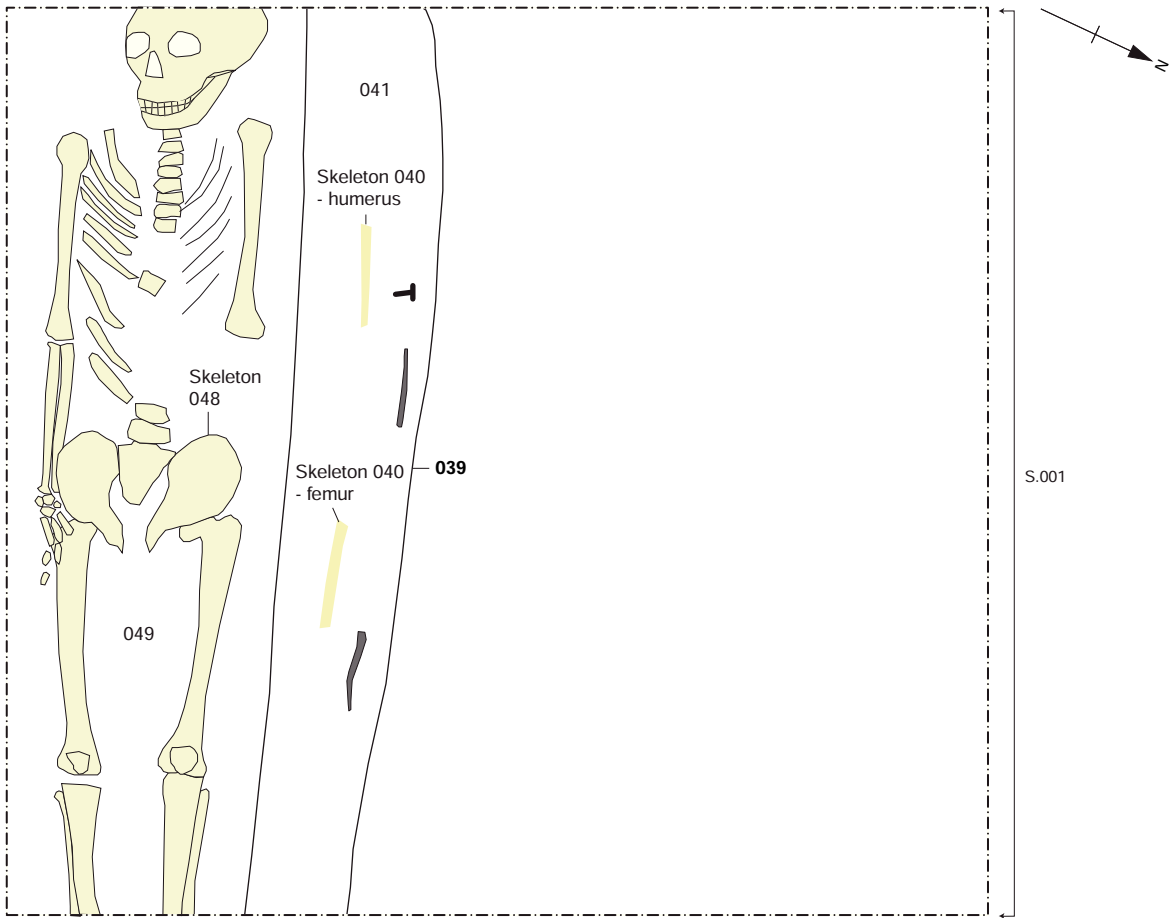
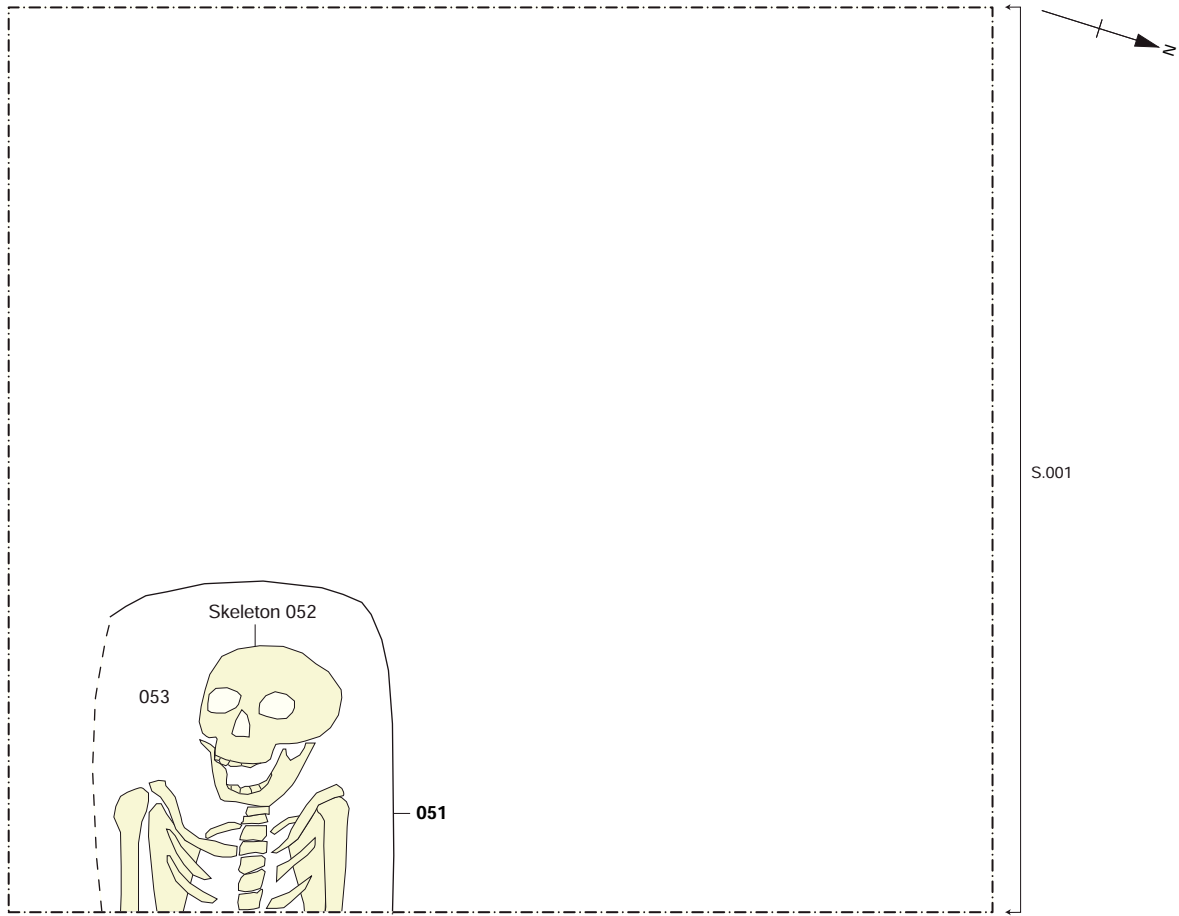


Figure 5: Plan 3 (underlay to Plan 002)

Plan 6



0 500 mm

1:10

Figure 6: Plan 4 (underlay to Plan 003)

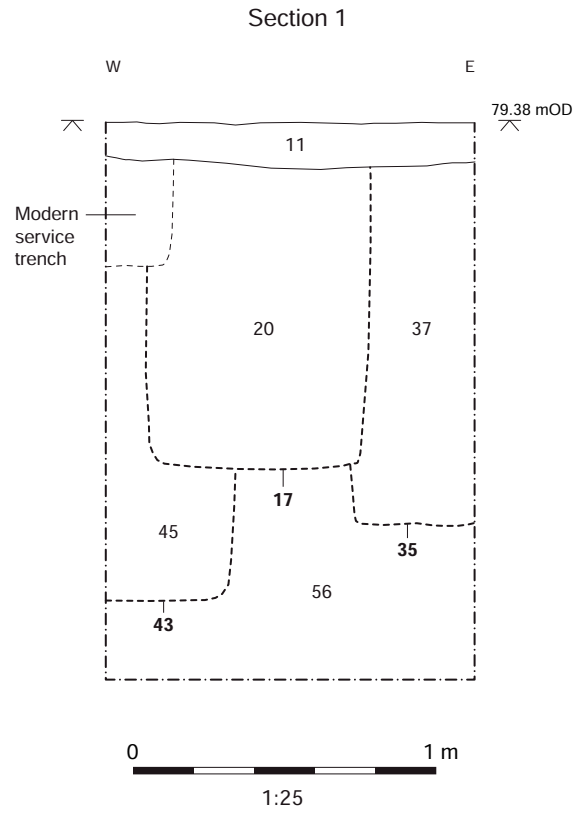


Figure 7: Section 1 - south facing section of sump



Plate 1: Skeleton 002



Plate 2: Skeleton 007



Plate 3: Skeleton 014



Plate 4: Skeleton 018



Plate 5: Skeleton 023



Plate 6: Skeletons 028 and 032



Plate 7: Skeleton 036



Plate 8: Skeleton 044



Plate 9: Skeleton 048



Plate 10: Skeleton 052



Plate 11: Coffin lace from Coffin 003 (Grave group 005) - Please note that the decoration has been highlighted in this image



Plate 12: Buttons from Grave group 005



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