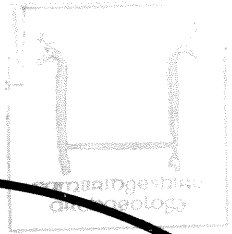


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ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE  
FULBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
HAGGLEY WAY FULBOURN  
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD TEL: 981614  
(Fax 981626)

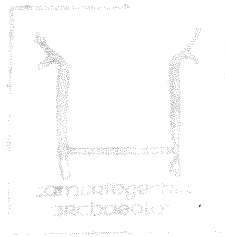
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## Excavations at Melbourn Churchyard - 1989



Cambridgeshire  
County Council

Rural Strategy



ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE  
MELBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE  
MELBOURN  
VIC 3071 TEL 881540 Tel 881614

## EXCAVATIONS IN MELBOURN CHURCHYARD

August 1989

NGR: 535452, 245382

Maximum depth = 2.8m

18 holes excavated

by Wendy Horton BA, M.Phil



## Summary

A watching brief was carried out on the excavation of 18 pits cut into the northern part of the churchyard of All Saints Church, Melbourn, to determine whether there were any archaeological remains of sufficient importance to prevent the construction of a new church meeting hall. The pits varied in size from 1m square to 1.35m square and from 1.4 to 2.8m deep. No structural remains were found, apart from a gravel path, but there were many graves and disturbed human remains.

## Introduction

Following a proposal to build a meeting hall in the graveyard immediately north of All Saints Church, Melbourn, it was agreed that Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Section should carry out an investigation of the relevant part of the churchyard to determine whether there were any archaeological remains of sufficient importance to prevent the construction of the meeting hall. The work was funded by the Parish of Melbourn. It was considered inappropriate to disturb any part of the churchyard for purely archaeological reasons because it was known to contain many human remains. Therefore the investigation was carried out in tandem with the first stage of the construction project, the excavation with a mechanical digger of 18 holes which would afterwards be filled with concrete and act as foundation pads. The construction project would only be allowed to continue beyond this stage if permission was granted. All the archaeological features disturbed were recorded and it was agreed that the human remains should be retrieved, analysed if appropriate, and then be returned to the parish for reburial.

## Setting

The ground on the north side of the churchyard has been levelled in the past and the headstones removed. According to the County Records there have been no inhumations in the graveyard since 1902, except for a few inhumations in family plots probably to the south of the church. The area is thus grassed over and the underlying geology is chalk.

## The Excavations

The holes had to be excavated to the level of the natural chalk. This varied from 1.4 to 2.8m below ground surface, partly because the chalk slopes down fairly steeply from south to north resulting in particularly deep holes along the northern edge. The soil above the chalk is a light grey-brown silty sand, with occasional pebbles and fragments of chalk.

## Results

### (a) The Burials

The density of human remains was found to be very great. The deepest burials were cut into the natural chalk, while the others were deposited at a higher level, but mainly below 1m from the ground surface. Later burials cut through earlier burials throughout so it was generally difficult to differentiate between individuals. This implies that the graveyard was in use for a long time and that there was little recollection of where earlier graves had been. As expected, the bodies were laid out orientated east-west in extended positions although many were found disarticulated because of the constant re-cutting mentioned above. In some cases two bodies were interred together, perhaps husband and wife. All the graves found contained adults, except for pit 2, where a very young child, possibly neonatal, was buried with an adult. Many of the individuals died in middle to old age since the teeth were generally worn and in bad condition. In several cases the individuals had lost all their teeth before death.

The greatest density of human remains were found nearest the church, particularly in pits 6 and 2. Fewer burials were found to the north, away from the church, and in pits 5 and 8, no burials were found at all.

### (b) Structural Remains and other features

No structural remains were found at all, except for the remains of a gravel path which was seen 40cm below ground surface in pits 14, 10A and 7A. It would have run across the north part of the churchyard and may have acted as the outer boundary of the graveyard at some time, especially since there are few burials to the northwest of it (none in pits 5 and 8, and a few in no. 11).

Modern building rubbish, including iron, concrete and stone was discovered in the top 1.5 cm of pit 8. It may have been used to help level up the ground surface along the north edge of the graveyard in recent times.

As mentioned above, the natural chalk was particularly deep along the north edge, being 2.8m below ground surface in pit 3 and 2.6m below the surface in pit 8. The chalk sloped down sharply and irregularly in these pits some may have been quarried.

A band of hard core approximately 1.1m down was found in pits 5, 8, 10A, and 11. 10A also contained some burnt building debris, mortar and charcoal. In general, however, there was very little building debris, and nothing to suggest a previous building on this site.

### (c) Artefacts

Artefacts, apart from bone, were not frequent. Metalwork from coffins, such as handles, rivets, nails and bosses were found in some graves, and in two cases (in pits 15 and 2), the wood from the coffins had survived although it was not in good condition. These two burials appeared to be relatively recent. Two gold (wedding) bands were discovered on the fourth finger of the left hand of the individual in pit 2. Both have hallmarks. One is 22 carat gold with the London standard mark and assay mark, and can be dated to 1862. The other is less easy to decipher, but is 18 carat gold with the London standard and assay marks. The most likely dates are 1874 or 1858. The individual, who was not young when she died, may have been interred at the end of the 19th century. As well as wood, spiralled metal handles, bosses, flat metal sheeting and nails were found, plus some black pitch which may have been used for sealing the coffin.

The only other artefact was a small white button found in pit no. 9.

### Conclusion

These excavations produced a very large volume of human remains. It was not considered appropriate to send them to a bone specialist for analysis, because

- a) The recent date of some burials would make such a study distasteful, and
- b) The highly disturbed nature of the remains would not produce a particularly valuable scientific study.



The bones were therefore returned to the parish for reburial.

The only structural feature found was a gravel path. Building debris was scarce and there was no sign of a rumoured north transept.

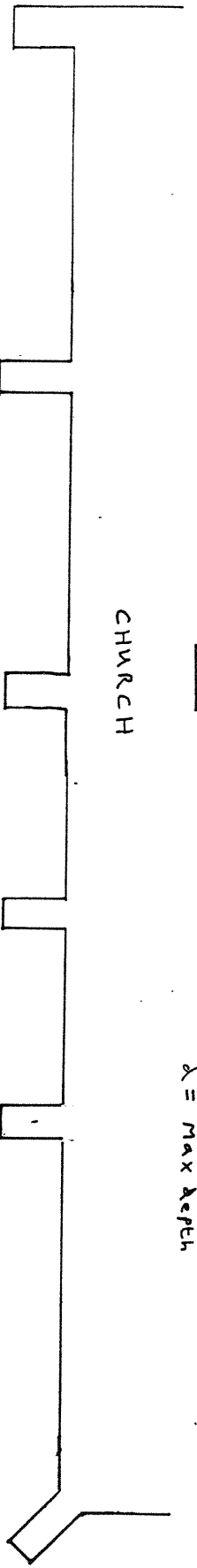
In conclusion, there were no archaeological features found during this investigation of sufficient importance to prevent the construction of a new church meeting hall on this site

MELBOURNE CHURCHYARD

1989

Key:  hole for foundation pad  
 cut for grave  
 $\Delta$  = Max depth

CHURCH




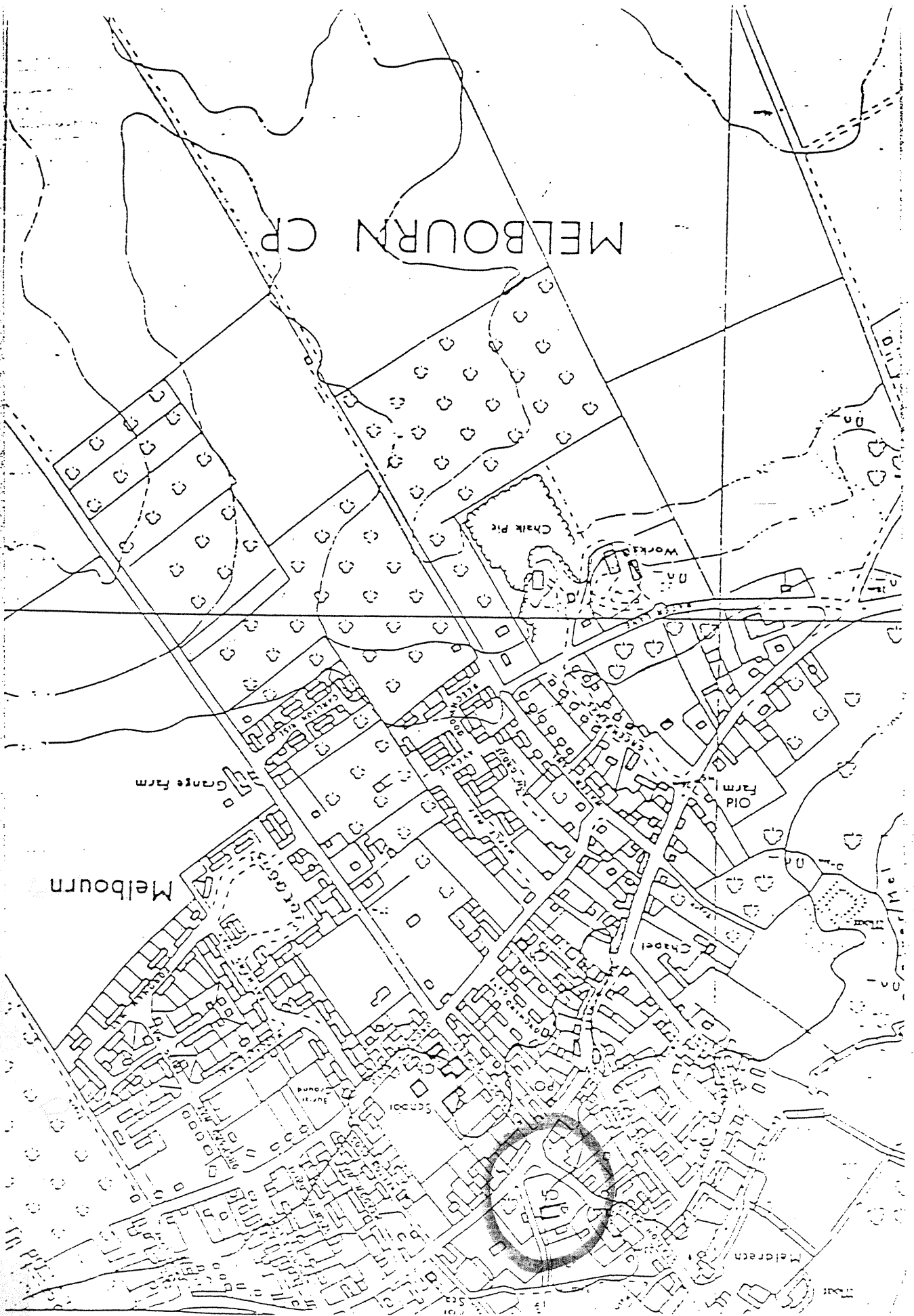
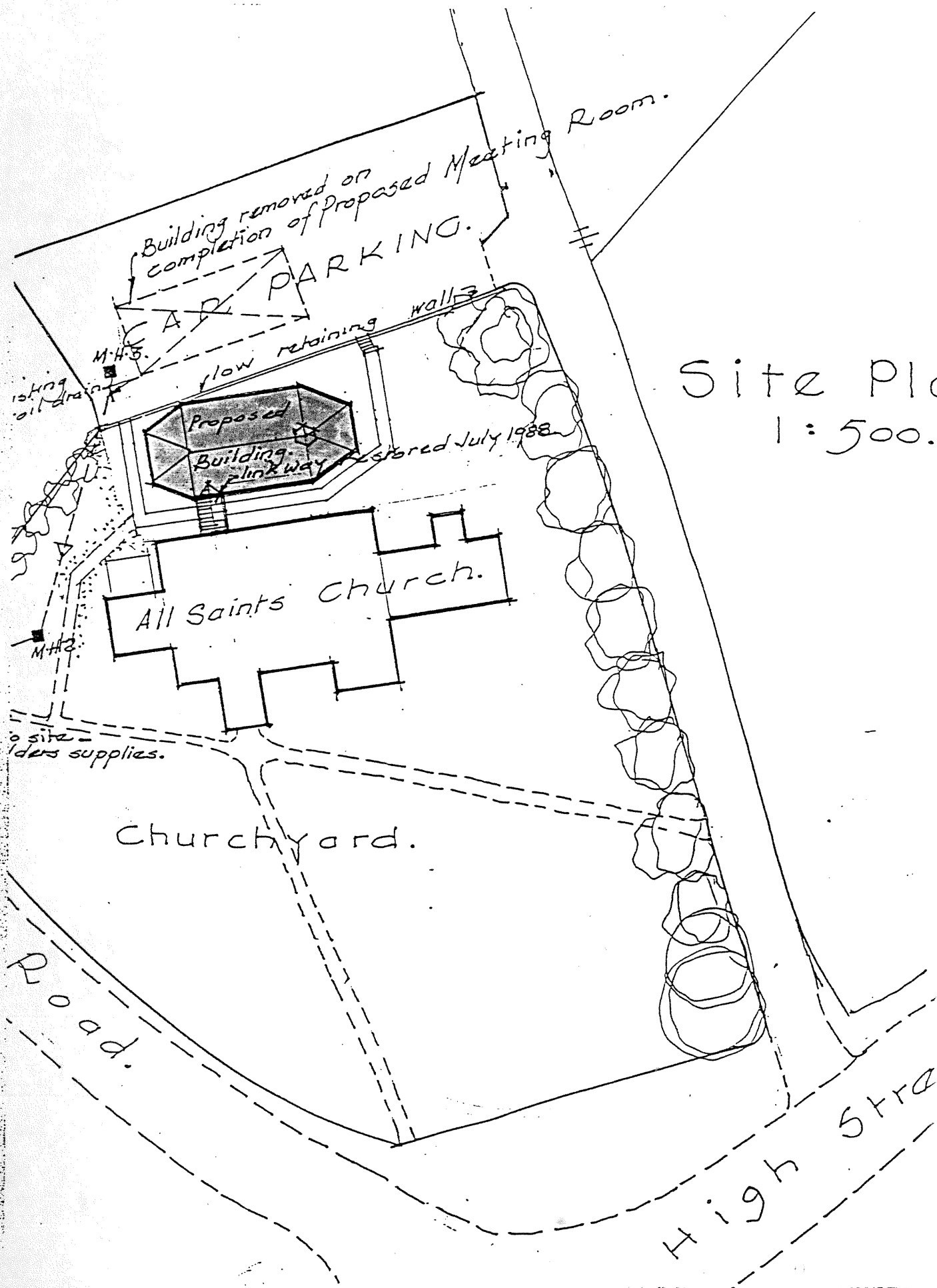
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Diagram showing 15 numbered graves (1-15) with their dimensions and descriptions:

- Grave 1:**  $\Delta = 1.4m$ , min. 4 ind., hole for foundation pad.
- Grave 2:**  $\Delta = 2m$ , min. 3 ind., one buried in well-preserved (creene) coffin with metal fittings, pitch sealing. 2 gold rings found on finger of ind. Piece of cloth also found.
- Grave 3:**  $\Delta = 2.8m$ , min. 3 ind., 2 appear to be mother infant.
- Grave 4:**  $\Delta = 1.85m$ , min. 4 ind., coffin remains.
- Grave 5:**  $\Delta = 1.75m$ , no burials.
- Grave 6:**  $\Delta = 1.95m$ , min. 3 ind.
- Grave 7A:**  $\Delta = 1.8m$ , min. 1 ind., gravel path on N. side.
- Grave 7B:**  $\Delta = 2.3m$ , min. 2 ind., coffin metalwork or gravel path one side.
- Grave 8:**  $\Delta = 2.6m$ , no burials.
- Grave 9:**  $\Delta = 1.8m$ , min. 4 ind., coffin remains.
- Grave 10:**  $\Delta = 1.85m$ , min. 4 ind., (3 skulls in) NE corner.
- Grave 11:**  $\Delta = 2.45m$ , min. 2 ind.
- Grave 12:** min. 2 ind., hole for foundation pad.
- Grave 13:**  $\Delta = 2m$ , min. 3 ind., remains of coffin.
- Grave 14:**  $\Delta = 2.3m$ , min. 3 ind., gravel path shows on S & W sides.
- Grave 15:**  $\Delta = 1.7m$ , min. 5 ind., remains of coffin; wood, metalwork etc.
- Grave 16:**  $\Delta = 2.1m$ , min. 5 ind.

# MELBOURN CP





Site Plan  
1:500.