Archaeological Watching Brief Report

St Mary the Virgin
Kirtlington

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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St Mary the Virgin Church
Kirtlington, Oxfordshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between the 21st April and 2nd May 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary the Virgin Church, Kirtlington (NGR SP 500 196). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects on behalf of the Incumbent and Church Wardens in advance of the excavation of approximately 25 m of service trench north and west of the church. The watching brief revealed 37 inhumations aligned west- east including one in a coffin, the fittings for 2 further coffins and a quantity of charnel. Little dating evidence was recovered from these burials, although the few coffin fittings retrieved were 18-19th century in date. No evidence for earlier church structures was observed during the course of the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between the 21st April and 2nd May 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary the Virgin Church, Kirtlington (NGR SP 500 196). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects on behalf of the Incumbent and Church Wardens as a requirement of a planning application for the laying of a service trench, for a sewerage pipe and arch sewerage management section, within the churchyard to the north and north-west of the church.

1.1.2 The works were undertaken in accordance with the Faculty issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford; Rupert Hingston Bursell in September 2007.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Kirtlington in Oxfordshire is located approximately ten miles north/north west of Oxford, to the east of the river Cherwell (Fig. 1). The site is situated within the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin Church, to the north and west of the church building. The churchyard is bounded to the east by a field, and to the north, west and south by residential dwellings. The site lies on Hanborough terraced river gravels (British Geological Survey Mapsheet 236) at *c*. 101 m above OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The village of Kirtlington was settled in Saxon times: its name is thought to come from the Old English for the 'tun of Cyrtla's people', and a Saxon burial has been discovered there (Townley 1959). The parish lies on the east bank of the River Cherwell, which divides it from the parish of Tackley. The Gallows Brook forms much of its eastern boundary. Kirtlington is mentioned in the Domesday Book, which states that it has two mills. Both were known to exist in the 13th century, but later references are to a single mill only (*ibid.*)

1.3.2 Anecdotal evidence suggests that the origins of St Mary the Virgin's church lie in the Anglo-Saxon period, when it was constructed out of wood. The earliest part of the church comprises the east and west arches of the tower, which are still standing today. The stone church and its tower was first constructed in the early12th century. The chancel, which was originally apsidal, was soon rebuilt in the late12th century on a rectangular plan and then rebuilt again in 1877 by G.G. Scott who copied the earlier medieval details and uncovered the original chancel's foundations. Around 1250 the nave was rebuilt and the aisles added. A 13th century piscina with a projecting bowl in the south chapel (behind the organ) suggests that there was an east chapel in the south aisle. This was removed when the south aisle and porch were re-built in the15th century. In the 15th century, the wall painting of St George and the Dragon with St Christopher standing to their right was painted above the (now blocked) door to the north aisle. By 1770 the 12th century tower of St Mary's was in a very poor and ruinous state and so it was demolished, leaving the east and west arches still standing. It was left like that for over 80 years, after which it was rebuilt in 1853 by Benjamin Ferry. Ferry incorporated the original tower arches into his new tower, which copied the Norman style, and reset an early 12th century tympanum over the vestry entrance. His works also included the construction of the stair turret on the north wall of the tower (Pevsner and Williamson 1994).

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.

2.1.2 To signal, before work proceeds, the discovery of an archaeological find for which further archaeological action is required.

2.1.3 To establish the number, character, location and depth of burials that may be affected by the above works.

2.1.4 To undertake rapid on site analysis of the articulated human remains by a qualified osteoarchaeologist.

2.1.5 To remove any human remains (whether articulated or charnel) and associated coffins and coffin fittings (with the exception of lead coffins) that will be impacted upon by these works, following on site recording.

2.1.6 To leave *in situ* all burials that would not be destroyed or damaged by the subsequent service trench and drainage pipes.

2.1.7 To rebury the human remains that were exhumed at a location within the churchyard to be determined during the works.

2.1.8 To generally observe the presence of burial vaults.

2.1.9 To determine the character of any masonry or structure associated with the church that may be affected by the service trench.

2.1.10 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The archaeological works were undertaken following the guidelines to the excavation of Christian burial grounds set out by Mays (2005).

2.2.2 The service trench was mechanically excavated under archaeological supervision, using a mini-digger fitted with a 0.3 m bladed bucket for the pipe section of the trench, and a 1m bladed bucket for the arch sewerage management section of the trench. Excavation by machine proceeded in spits down to the top of the burial horizon.

2.2.3 Archaeological contexts were allocated a context number from a continuous running sequence starting from (1).

2.2.4 Burials were treated as a unit or grave group and allocated a single context number. Each burial group comprised a grave cut, the skeleton, the grave backfill and any associated coffin and coffin fittings. Where necessary, skeletons and the remains of associated coffins and their fittings were hand excavated and removed with due care and regard to the sensitivities involved when dealing with human remains.

2.2.5 Only skeletal elements exposed within the trench limits were excavated, and as a result many excavated skeletons were incomplete. Burials below the level to be impacted by the development were left *in situ*.

2.2.6 All excavation, lifting and recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (D Wilkinson 1992). All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:20 and representative sections of the trench baulk (Fig. 4) were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using digital camera. A general photographic record of the work was made.

2.2.7 A rapid examination of the discrete articulated inhumations was undertaken by a qualified osteoarchaeologist. The preservation of the bone, the age and sex of the skeleton, and any pathological lesions (diseases and injuries) were recorded.

2.2.8 Any associated coffin fittings, namely grips and grip plates, were classified by comparing them with the taxonomy of coffin fitting styles compiled by Reeve and Adams (1993), as well as the growing corpus of styles recorded by OA (Boyle *et al*. 2006a,b). New styles identified from St Mary's were added to this corpus and pre-fixed with the code: KIRTMV. Classifying coffin fittings in this way assists with dating burials, and provides insight into different aspects of funerary material culture, for example social status, perceptions of death and resurrection, and technology.

2.2.9 Following rapid osteological examination, all human remains and their associated coffin fittings were re-buried in a suitable location within the trench from whence they came.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

Service pipe trench

3.1.1 The first section of the trench (*c.* 4 m) ran south - north and was located to the north of the church building towards the west end (Fig 1). There it was widened for a manhole and turned east - west (*c.* 6 m). It then turned north - south where another manhole was to be constructed and ran for a short distance (*c.* 0.8 m) before widening and continuing to the west of the church's main entrance.

3.1.2 The trench was approximately 0.3 m wide, where the sewerage pipe was to be laid, and 1.0 m wide where the arch sewerage management was to be constructed. The service pipe section started at 0.6 m below present ground level and dropped to 0.8 m. The arch sewerage management section of the trench started at 0.9m below present ground level and decreased at a one in 20 gradient for the first 5 m to 1.15m. It continued at this depth for the rest of its length.

3.1.3 The underlying natural geology was not encountered in any part of the trench.

3.1.4 The natural geology was overlain by the graveyard soil (2), a layer of disturbed mid-yellowish brown sandy silt which contained a moderate amount of sandstone fragments (5 - 25cm). This graveyard soil was excavated up to a depth of 1.15 m. Its full depth was not reached during excavation. A total of 37 burials, 3 coffins and a large quantity of charnel were revealed in this deposit (Fig. 3.). All of the burials were aligned west-east, with the head in the west end facing east. Layer 2 was sealed by a layer of topsoil and turf (1) with an average depth of 0.18m. The only exception to this was where the trench cut through the modern hardcore paths.

3.1.5 Due to modern disturbance, and the difficulty in distinguishing the backfill of graves from the graveyard soil into which they were cut, only the grave cut of post-medieval grave group 035 was defined. This grave cut had vertical sides and was probably rectangular, or sub-rectangular in plan, although it was only observed in section (Fig 4). The edges of other grave cuts could be estimated, in part, by where they truncated earlier graves.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Finds consisted entirely of human remains and coffin remains. Human remains are described in the following section. Grave groups 022, 027 and 035 included the remains of coffins. Coffin 022 was represented by three iron coffin grips, three grip plates made of tin, three fixing nails and ten upholstery studs. These all appeared to be at the foot end of the coffin, however as they were found at the required depth of excavation, the skeletal remains, which were deeper, were not uncovered. Coffin 027 was represented by three fixing nails both found near the feet of the skeleton, and fragments of an embossed decorate strip made out of tin. Two copper alloy shroud pins were also recovered from this grave, and were located on the left mid tibia and distal

femur of the skeleton. Coffin 035 was represented by one iron grip which had been attached onto the coffin (long perished) the wrong way round, one iron grip plate which had the remains of embossed writing on it, four fixing nails and twenty-eight upholstery studs (see Section 5 below).

3.2.2 No personal effects were recovered in the St Mary's assemblage.

4 THE HUMAN REMAINS

4.1 Methodology

4.1.1 Data on the completeness of the skeleton, the condition of the bone, age, sex, stature and pathology were recorded for each skeleton where possible (Table 1). Recording of adult age and sex was based on the recommendations set out by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) and by Brickley and McKinley (2004). Sub-adult individuals were aged based on epiphyseal fusion and long bone lengths (Scheuer and Black 2000) and dental development (Moorrees et al. 1963, Smith 1991). In accordance with standard practice, no attempt was made to estimate the sex of the sub-adults because there are still no widely accepted methods for doing so. Stature was estimated by measuring the maximum lengths of long bones and applying these to the relevant formulae for whites devised by Trotter and Gleser and later modified by Trotter (1970). Only gross pathological lesions were recorded.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 A total of 37 skeletons were recorded and excavated. The location of all skeletons is shown in Fig. 3. This is with the exception of five skeletons which were entirely removed by the mini-digger before they were spotted. These were all neonates and infants, whose tiny bones made their identification *in situ* (prior to excavation by the machine) impossible. These were skeletons 004, 005, 015, 017 and 032.

4.2.2 One skeleton (027) had associated coffin fittings which suggested that it was of a post-medieval date. All other burials are presumed to be medieval because none were accompanied by post-medieval coffin fittings. Although post medieval coffin fittings were found in two other graves (022 and 035), the skeletal remains associated with them were not uncovered (see Section 5 below).

4.2.3 Only one of the skeletons was complete (skeleton 040). In most cases, less than 50% of the skeleton was present or could be recovered. This incompleteness was due to the partial exhumation of the remains (within the limits of the excavation), and disturbance caused by inter-cutting graves. The bones were in a very good state of preservation. In most cases the cortical bone was very well or excellently preserved.

4.2.4 Nineteen of the skeletons were adult and eighteen were sub-adult. Of the adults, ten were female or possible female and eight were male or possible male. Only one skeleton could not be assigned a sex owing to a lack of information. The ages ranged from neonate to prime adult (26-35 years). A specific adult age range could not be determined for some skeletons. These were simply classified as adult (>18 years).

4.2.5 Stature could be calculated for eleven adults, of which ten medieval in date and one was post-medieval in date. The estimated statures of six female skeletons (all medieval in date) ranged between 1.53 m (5 ft 0") and 1.66 m (5ft 5") with a mean of 1.62 m (5ft 4"), whilst the four medieval males ranged between 1.63 m (5ft 4") and 1.70 m (5ft 7"), with a mean stature of 1.68 m (5ft 6"). This puts every single one of the males below mean stature for medieval Britain (1.71 m, or 5ft 8") and all but one of the females (skeleton 20) above the medieval mean (1.59 m, or 5ft 3") (Roberts and Cox 2003). The single post-medieval skeleton (027) had a stature of 1.78 m (5ft 10") making him taller than the mean stature that has been calculated for post-medieval British males (1.71 m, or 5ft 7") (Roberts and Cox 2003).

4.2.6 Joint disease was by far the most common pathological condition in this assemblage, occurring on a variety of locations on a total of nine adults. Joint disease affecting the spine was found on skeletons 011, 016, 020, 029, 033 and 034. It was usually exhibited in the form of marginal osteophytes (new bone growth) on the vertebral bodies of the thoracic vertebrae, but there were also examples on the lumbar vertebrae (011, 016 and 033) the top of the sacrum (033) and the cervical vertebrae (011 and 016). In the case of 011 it was so severe that it had resulted in fusion between the sixth and seventh cervical vertebrae (Plate 6), as well as the fifth and sixth thoracic vertebrae. Other evidence for spinal joint disease in this assemblage was in the form of pitting on the inferior and superior articulating surfaces of the thoracic vertebrae (011, 016 and 020) and the lumbar vertebrae (016). Joint disease was also found in the elbow joints of 09 (Plate 5) and 024, and on the first toes and ankles of 027 in the form of marginal osteophytes, and on 020 as porosity on the sterno-clavicular joint of the manubrium and left clavicle.

4.2.7 Dental pathologies were found on four adults. Periodontal disease (affecting the upper incisors of 010 and the left molars of 016) and caries (affecting both upper first molars of 10 and the upper left first premolar of 012) were the most common, but there was some calculus (011) and an impacted lower left canine (012).

4.2.8 Fractures were found on one, possibly two individuals. Skeleton 012, had a healed fracture involving the left clavicle, which was poorly aligned. A smooth lump of new bone was present on the left tibia shaft (Plate 7) of 024. This may represent a healed fracture or an ossified haematoma. Without radiography this diagnosis remains inconclusive.

4.2.9 Skeleton 037, a possible male aged between 18 and 25 years at death, exhibited signs of childhood rickets. Both of the femora had exaggerated anterior bowing, but there was no diaphyseal flaring. This skeleton was very incomplete and was represented by both femora, the proximal articular surfaces of the tibiae, a partial left ilium and a patella only. The absence of many parts of this skeleton meant that it was not possible to confirm this diagnosis.

Table 1. Summary results of the on site osteological analysis

Skeleton	Completeness	Condition	Age	Sex	Stature	Observations/Pathology
4	<25%	Good	Infant (1.1 month - 2	-	-	-

			years)			
5	25-50%	Good	Neonate (36 wks - 1 month)	-	-	-
6	<25%	Good	Older child (5.1-12 years)	-	-	-
7	<25%	Good	Infant (1.1 month - 2 years	-	-	-
8	50-75%	Good	Older child (5.1-12 years)	-	-	-
9	25-50%	Good	Prime adult (26-35 years)	Male	1.70 m	Very robust skull. Marginal osteophytes on the left and right proximal ulna and distal humerus. Well marked muscle attachments. Enthesophyte on anterior-lateral surface of right radius (in line with the tuberosity)
10	50-75%	Good	Prime adult (26-35 years)	Female?	1.66 m	Congenital absence of lower left and both upper M3. Periodontal disease on upper incisors and large caries on both upper M1
11	25-50%	Good	Adult (>25 years)	Female	1.60 m	Dental calculus and heavy tooth wear. Slight marginal osteophytosis on inferior body of C2, severe on C3-C5 , T1-T2 and T7-T9, C6-C7 and T5-T6 fused together. porosity of the superior articular facts of T5-T6
12	<25%	Good	Adult (>18 years)	Male	-	Large mastoid process, pronounced glabella and thick orbital rims. Healed and slightly malaligned fracture on left clavicle. Impacted lower left Canine. Gross caries on upper left P1. Most molars lost ante mortem.
13	<25%	Good	Older child (6-10 years)	-	-	Older child based on full eruption of all permanent incisors and M1s, permanent upper canines just erupting. M2s not erupted, but upper ones visible in crypt.
14	<25%	Excellent	Adult	Female?	-	Sex based on femoral head size and gracility of the bones
15	<25%	Excellent	Neonate (36 wks - 1 month)	-	-	-
16	50-75%	Good	Prime Adult (26-35 years)	Female?	1.62 m	Exostosis on right humeral head, marginal osteophytes on C3-C7, T8-T12 and L4-L5. Pitting on inferior and superior articular surfaces of T1-T10 and L1-L4. Periodontal disease by left molars
17	<25%	Excellent	Infant (<6 months)	-	-	Age based upon dental eruption, mandible starting to fuse
18	50-75%	Good	Infant (7-8 months)	-	-	Age based upon dental eruption, upper M2 beginning to erupt, upper dI2 erupting
19	50-75%	Good	Older child (11-12 years)	-	-	Upper M2 fully erupted, root of lower M2 3/4 formed
20	25-50%	Excellent	Adult (>25 years)	Female	1.53 m	Feminine cranial features, humeral head 38.5mm. Porosity on sterno-clavicular joints of the manubrium and of left clavicle. T1-T12 have slight porosity on inferior and superior facets and slight marginal osetophytes on the bodies.
21	<25%	Good	Adolescent (12-14	-	-	Metacarpal heads unfused, sacral fusion occurring

			years)			
23	<25%	Good	Adult	-	-	Heavily truncated
24	25-50%	Good	Adult	?Male	-	Osteophytosis on proximal articular surface of right ulna. Trauma on left tibia shaft, either ossifying heamotoma or fracture
25	<25%	Excellent	Adult	?Female	-	Heavily truncated
26	<25%	Good	Adult	?Female	-	Heavily truncated
27	25-50%	Excellent	Adult	Male	1.78 m	Sex based on femoral head diameter of 57 mm. Porier's facets. Marginal osteophytes of proximal 1st toe phalanx surface and of calcaneal facets of talus. Very large and pronounced muscle attachments on leg long bones
28	25-50%	Excellent	Adolescent (14-16 years)	-	-	-
29	25-50%	Good	Adult	?Female	1.66 m	Marginal osteophytes on superior and inferior bodies of T1-T12
30	50-75%	Fair-poor	Young child (3.5-4 years)	-	-	proximal and distal femur and tibia epiphyses unfused.
31	<25%	Excellent	Adult	?Female	-	Very tick cranial vault, up to *c.* 10 mm
32	50-75%	Excellent	Young child (2.1-5 years)	-	-	Vertebral arches fused, but not to centrum
33	<25%	Excellent	Adult	Male	1.70 m	Marginal osteophytes on Lumbar vertebrae and S1
34	25-50%	Good	Adult	?Female	1.66 m	Slight marginal osteophytes on thoracic vertebrae
36	50-75%	Good	Young child (3.5-4.5 years)	-	-	No fusion of pelvis elements
37	<25%	Excellent	Young adult (18-25 years)	?Male	1.63 m	Fusion line of femoral head still visible. Third trochanter present. Anterior bowing of both femora, but no diaphyseal flaring, possibly childhood rickets
38	<25%	Fair	Adult	?Male	-	-
39	25-50%	Good	Infant (9 months - 1 year)	-	-	Vertebral arches only just fused
40	75-100%	Good	Young child (4-4.5 years)	-	-	Metopic suture unfused. Thoracic arches fusing onto bodies, Lumbar arches fused onto bodies. Bone length and dental eruption indicate age
41	<25%	Excellent	Adult	?Male	1.68 m	Sex based only on robusticity of femora and tibia. Both fibula showed exaggerated bowing at the midshaft. Slight enthesophyte on left tibia at proximal fibula articulation
42	<25%	good	Adult (>25 years)	-	-	Medial clavicle fused

Key: C=cervical spine; T=thoracic spine; M=molar; P=premolar; d=deciduous tooth.

4.2.10 A very large quantity of charnel was recovered across the site, but especially so in the region of the coffin burials (022, 027 and 035) where concentrations were found either above, to one side, or at the foot end of them. One discrete charnel deposit was identified (03), but it did not appear to have been deposited within a clearly defined cut. This deposit contained at least three adults and a sub-adult. The remaining charnel was from at least ten other individuals and included adults and sub-adults.

Upstanding monuments

4.2.11 Whilst no upstanding monuments were disturbed during the watching brief it is still worth mentioning one, that of Thomas and Susannah Hawkes (Plate 12.). It is located towards the southern end of the trench, directly west of where coffin burial 035 was located. Its position suggests that it is probably the monument that belongs with this burial. Its inscription reads : 'THOMAS HAWKES, WHO DIED FEBRUARY 11 1848, AGED 62 YEARS, ALSO OF, SUSANNAH HIS WIFE, WHO DIED MAY 5 1860, AGED 72 YEARS'. Given that 035 was the only coffin to be encountered in that plot, it probably belongs to Susannah Hawkes. No skeletal remains were recovered from 035 because they lay below the level of impact. A femur (recorded as charnel) that was found lying to its north side may have been that of Susannah's husband, Thomas, whose remains may have been disturbed by the burial of his wife, 12 years after his own.

5 THE COFFIN FITTINGS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Three graves in the St Mary's churchyard contained the remnants of post-medieval coffin fittings. All of the fittings were recorded and analysed on site. The fittings came from graves 022, 027 and 035.

5.2 Historical background

5.2.1 In Britain from the late 17th century onwards, it became customary to cover the coffin with an upholstery of baize or velvet, to decorate the side and lid panels of coffin with metal upholstery studs and other fittings. By the early 18th century, the funeral furnishing trade was a well established business providing coffins for all classes of people at various costs, depending upon the status and 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). However, the coffin was just one aspect of the elaborate mourning and funerary practices surrounding the death of a loved one at this time. Funerals of the wealthy often involved processions of black draped hearses, black plumed horses, mutes and chief mourners and the heavily decorated coffin itself. Greater simplicity in funerary practices re-asserted itself after the 1840s, when elaborate, expensive funerals began to be regarded as vulgar, ostentatious displays of wealth and status, and were increasingly considered to be in poor taste.

Coffin fittings

5.2.2 The most frequently recovered coffin remains from the post medieval period are the fittings themselves. During this period, the number and materials used for these 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 one with many accoutrements as they could afford.

5.2.3 Coffin fittings usually comprised one to four *departum* plates (an inner and outer breastplate, a headplate and a footplate), lid motifs, escutcheons, grips and grip plates, and were made from tin or, more common, brass or iron. In addition, brass and iron studs, originally used to secure the upholstery to the wooden case, had become a decorative device, being arranged to create complex patterns on the lid and side panels of the coffin. Once solely functional, the grips by which the mourners carried the coffin became stylistically elaborate during the 18th century, as did the grip plates to which the grips were attached to the coffin.

5.2.4 Grips were produced by casting, but the rest of the coffin fittings were stamped using dies (May 1996). Between 1720-30 these were produced by hand-operated die stamping machines, but after this such machines became power-assisted. Coffin fittings could then be produced *en masse* and were financially accessible to a wide audience by the mid- to late Georgian period (*ibid.*).

5.3 Results

5.3.1 The remains of three coffins were recovered from St Mary's. No trace of the coffins themselves, all long perished, were not found. No evidence for a coffin was found in association with the other burials. It is possible that, in these cases, the now decomposed coffins, which had not been fitted with metal (which would survive the burial environment) were held together with wooden pegs rather than nails. However, more likely is the fact these represent plain interments where the individuals were placed straight in the ground in a shroud. This was a common burial practice during the Medieval period (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005).

5.3.2 Of the coffin remains that were recovered, only one (027) was shallow enough to permit the excavation of the skeletal remains associated with them. The other two sets of coffin remains (022 and 035) were found at the very base of the trench (i.e. the limit of excavation), beyond which their associated skeletal remains lay. No skeletal remains were therefore examined in association with these.

5.3.3 The majority of the coffin fittings were made of iron, but the three grip plates from 022 were made of tin and painted black, as were the decorative strips from 027. The grips from both 022 (Plates 8 and 9) and 035 (Plate 10) are of previously unknown styles, and are illustrated in Plate 13 (KIRTMV 1 and KIRTMV 2). An upstanding monument above coffin 035 suggests that KIRTMV 2 dates to *c.* 1860. The grip plates from 022 and 035 were too poor to observe their styles in any detail, if at all.

5.3.4 Black painted tin was an expensive material to use for coffin fittings and, hence, carried a caché that other, poorer, materials did not (Litten 1991). It is therefore possible that the black painted iron grips from 022 and the grip and grip plate from 035 were an attempt by the mourners to disguise the fact that they were made of a cheaper material. Alternatively, the use of iron here may have been motivated by practical reasons. Tin is a soft, malleable material and is therefore not very practical

to use for coffin grips which need to be rigid and strong. Thus, maybe only the coffin grip plate from 035 (which would have had a decorative, rather than functional, purpose), should be considered as an attempt at subterfuge.

5.3.5 The fittings from 027 were much simpler compared with those from 035 and 022. It had no grips and the only decoration was a single black painted tin strip that was approximately 15mm wide and which would have run around the sides of the coffin. The strip was decorated with a row of embossed circles which had a border above and below. It is possible that coffin 027 was from a time when funerary panoply had not yet become fully established and was earlier in date than 022 and 035. Alternatively, it may represent the coffin of a poorer individual whose mourners could only afford to decorate the coffin with the tin strip, rather than with iron grips or grip plates.

5.3.6 One grip plate (from 035) carried the remnants of embossed writing. The outside of the plate was heavily corroded, but it was possible to read the writing on its reverse side (Plate 011). It read:

....BLESSED ARE...

...THAT...

...MOURN

This probably originally read: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (The Gospel of St Mathew, Chapter 5, Verse 4)

Table 2: Summary of coffin fittings examined

Context	**Grip** ***(N = 4)***	**Grip plate** ***(N =4)***	**Coffin nails** ***(N =10)***	**Upholstery studs** ***(N=37)***	**Other fittings** ***(N= >20)***
22	x3. Fe (with black paint). Moderately corroded. x2 adhered to parts of the grip plates. x3 new style (KIRTMV 1)	x3. Sn (with black paint). x2 adhered to grips. x1 crumbled upon lifting	x3. Fe. Moderately corroded	x10.Fe. Moderately corroded.	-

27	-	-	x3. Fe. Moderately corroded	-	Numerous scraps >20. Sn painted black. Embossed decorative strip
35	x1. Fe (with black paint). Did adhered to grip plate, but broke away upon lifting. x1 new style *c.* 1860 (KIRTMV 2)	x1. Fe (with black paint). Moderately corroded. Embossed writing: 'BLESSED ARE... ...THAT... ...MOURN'	x4. Fe. Moderately corroded	x27. Fe. Moderately corroded.	-

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1.1 A total of thirty-six skeletons, probably dating to the later medieval period, one skeleton dating to the post-medieval period, and the fittings from three post-medieval coffins were recovered from thirty-nine earth cut graves, many of which were intercutting. No grave cuts could not be fully identified at the time of excavation and many were inferred from where they had truncated earlier burials. This is with the exception of one (035). Here, the grave cut was tight around the skeleton, suggesting that the individual had not been buried within a coffin. In the medieval period, most people were buried uncoffined and within a shroud. Thus wide, regularly shaped, well finished graves were unnecessary (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005,111; Jupp and Gittings 1999, 104). The fact that the burials encountered were fairly shallow (ranging between 0.63 m and 1.15 m below the current ground level) is also a common feature of medieval burials, in part explained by the fact that the grave was dug during, or after, the Requiem mass (Jupp and Gittings 1999, 104; Friar 2003, 70).

6.1.2 In terms of the burial population, a high proportion of the assemblage comprised the burials of sub-adults (48.6 %) including two neonates (36 weeks - 1 month), five infants (between 1.1 month and 2 years), five young children (between 2.1 and 5 years), four older children (5.1 - 12 years) and two adolescents (13 - 17 years). The zoning of sub-adult burials is a recognised feature of medieval churchyards (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 67). For example, in a presumed lay cemetery at the Augustinian priory of SS Peter and Paul, Taunton, Somerset, a cluster of 20 infants were recovered during excavations to the south-west of the church (*ibid.*). Gilchrist and Sloane (2005) have observed that it was common for infant burials to cluster around porches, paths or boundary walls (*ibid.*). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising to find them clustered near the path at St Mary's, (if it can be assumed that the present day path has not changed much, in terms of its location, since the medieval period).

6.1.3 The proportion of adult males to females (44% males to 56% females) does not show any particular bias towards either of the sexes. The slight imbalance is probably due to the heavy truncation on some of the skeletons and the fact that only a small proportion of the cemetery was excavated. Further, several of the skeletons could only be classified as possible males and possible females, rather than definite males and females.

6.1.4 The stature of the medieval skeletons from St Mary's is worthy of note. The males were all below the average height for late medieval Britain, being on average 3 cm

shorter. All but one of the females was above the late medieval average for females. They were, on average, 3 cm taller. Although environmental factors play a part, approximately 90% of an individual's final achieved height is determined by genes (Brothwell 1981). Environmental factors that may result in reduced stature include malnutrition and chronic disease. One skeleton from St Mary's may have had childhood rickets, however no other evidence for malnutrition, or chronic disease, was observed

6.1.5 Spinal joint disease was by far the most common pathological condition amongst the medieval assemblage and involved 60% of the adult skeleton spines that were examined. It was often severe, and most commonly involved the thoracic vertebrae. Spinal joint disease is a normal accompaniment to ageing and is common among individuals over the age of about 40 years. It is therefore interesting to observe that some of the individuals from St Mary's who had this disease were younger than this. Early on-set joint disease may be related to repetitive activities, carried out over an extended period of time, that place stress on a particular part of the spine. The small sample size and incomplete nature of the remains means that it cannot be said if this was due to activity or an inherited susceptibility to the disease from an early age.

6.1.6 Given that there was only one skeleton dated to the post-medieval period (027) no conclusions can be drawn up about the post-medieval population of Kirtlington. However the individual in question was a male, who stood standing 7 cm taller than the average male of his time. His pronounced muscle attachments and large joints indicate that he was probably a well built and robust individual

6.1.7 The remains of 3 coffins (as represented by fittings) from St Mary's reflect two different ends of the fittings market. Coffin 027 is at the lower end; it lacked the ornate grips, grip plates and upholstery studs found on the other two coffins (022 and 035), but it did have a single decorative strip of black planted tin. Coffins 022 and 035 had decorated grips, grip plates and upholstery studs, all indicative of higher status burials compared with 027. The grip on coffin 035 had been fitted the wrong way round, so that the decorated side was hidden against the coffin. Whilst this was almost certainly a mistake the fact that it wasn't rectified might represent a lack of immediate funds to do so.

6.1.8 Two new styles of coffin grips were identified from St Mary's and make an important contribution to archaeological research into Georgian/Victorian funerary regalia. These add to the growing corpus of styles that have been documented from post-medieval cemeteries around the country, and which are vital in enriching our understanding of the material culture of the Georgian/Victorian funeral and, through this, insights into perceptions of death and resurrection in the 18th and 19th centuries.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	*Type*	*Depth*	*Length*	*Width*	*Height*	*Comments*	*Finds*
1	Layer	-		-	-	Topsoil and turf throughout the churchyard	
2	Layer	>1.15m		-	-	Burial soil throughout the churchyard	
3	Charnel deposit	-	-	0.9 m	100.90	Human skulls, long bones, ribs and vertebrae, 1 sub-adult, 3 adults	
4	Grave group	-	> 0.45 m	> 0.1 m	100.86	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
5	Grave group	-	0.35 m	> 0.1 m	100.97	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
6	Grave group	-	> 0.2m	> 0.1 m	100.97	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
7	Grave group	-	> 0.45 m	> 0.15 m	101.04	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
8	Grave group	-	> 0.7 m	*c.* 0.25 m	100.75	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
9	Grave group	-	> 0.6 m	*c.* 0.5 m	100.70	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
10	Grave group	-	> 0.7 m	*c.* 0.39 m	100.72	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
11	Grave group	-	> 0.4 m	> 0.35 m	100.74	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 14	
12	Grave group	-	> 0.38m	> 0.23 m	100.83	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 13	
13	Grave group	-	> 0.35 m	*c.* 0.3 m	100.74	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
14	Grave group	-	0.5 m	> 1 m	100.69	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by	
15	Grave group	-	> 0.1 m	> 0.1 m	100.71	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
16	Grave group	-	> 1 m	0.52 m	100.56	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
17	Grave group	-	> 0.1 m	> 0.1 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill	

18	Grave group	-	> 0.65 m	*c.* 0.35 m	100.74	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
19	Grave group	-	> 0.8 m	*c.* 0.33 m	100.67	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
20	Grave group	-	> 0.65 m	> 0.28 m	100.70	Cut, skeleton and backfill Truncated by 21 and 22	
21	Grave group	-	> 0.35 m	> 0.25 m	100.62	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 22	
22	Grave group	-	> 1 m	0.5 m	100.48	Cut, coffin and backfill	3 coffin grips, 3 grip plates, 3 fixing nails and 10 upholstery studs
23	Grave group	-	> 0.2 m	> 0.2 m	100.48	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 22	
24	Grave group	-	> 1 m	> 0.34 m	100.51	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 22	
25	Grave group	-	> 1 m	> 0.15 m	100.53	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 24	
26	Grave group	-	> 1 m	> 0.1 m	100.55	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 25	
27	Grave group	-	> 0.8 m	*c.* 0.5 m	100.44	Cut, skeleton, coffin and backfill	3 fixing nails, 2 shroud pins, scraps of tin decorative strips
28	Grave group	-	> 1 m	*c.* 0.5 m	100.47	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
29	Grave group	-	> 0.5 m	> 0.37 m	100.64	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 30	
30	Grave group	-	*c.* 1 m	> 0.25 m	100.50	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
31	Grave group	-	> 0.2 m	*c.* 0.4 m	100.54	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
32	Grave group	-	-	-	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
33	Grave group	-	> 0.75 m	> 0.3 m	100.58	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
34	Grave group	-	> 0.9 m	> 0.25 m	100.47	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
35	Grave group	-	> 0.25 m	0.5 m	100.47	Cut, coffin and	1 grip, 1 grip

						backfill	plate, 4 fixing nails, 28 upholstery studs
36	Grave group	-	*c.* 1 m	*c.* 0.3 m	100.47	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 35	
37	Grave group	-	> 0.5 m	*c.* 0.4 m	100.41	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
38	Grave group	-	> 0.62 m	> 0.22 m	100.56	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
39	Grave group	-	> 0.4 m	*c.* 0.2 m	100.79	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
40	Grave group	-	*c.* 1 m	*c.* 0.27 m	100.85	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
41	Grave group	-	> 0.67 m	> 0.25 m	100.51	Cut, skeleton and backfill	
42	Grave group	-	> 0.38 m	> 0.28 m	100.89	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 40	

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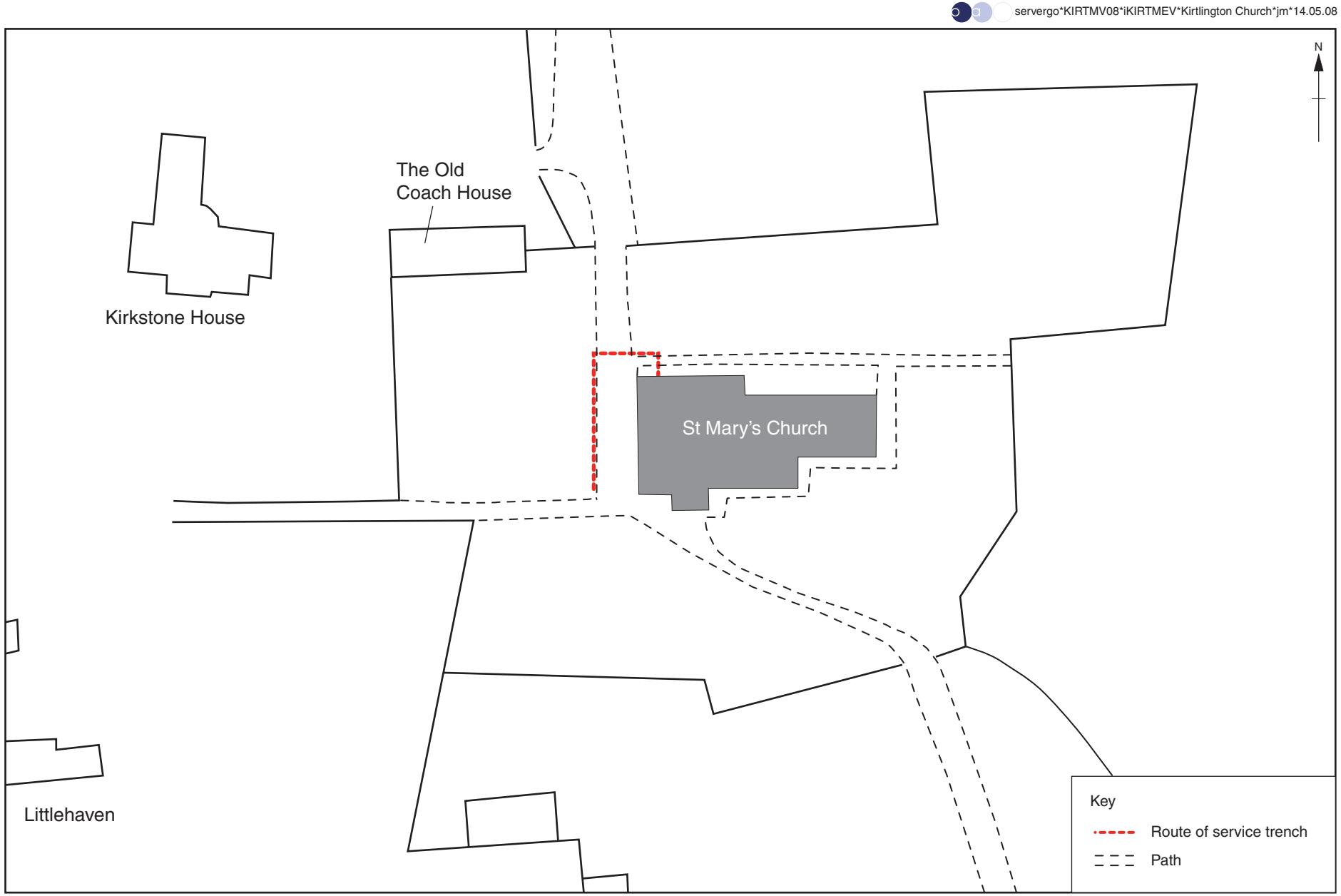
APPENDIX 4 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Mary the Virgin Church, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire
Site code: KIRTMV08
Grid reference: SP 500 196
Type of watching brief: One 25.8 m service trench within a churchyard
Date and duration of project: 21st April to 2nd May 2008
Area of site: *c. 18.24 m*
Summary of results: The watching brief during works for a service trench revealed the presence of 37 inhumations aligned west - east as well as a quantity of charnel. Little evidence was recovered to enable dating for most of these inhumations but it is believed the majority of them are medieval. Coffin fittings from 3 post-medieval coffins were also recovered. No evidence for earlier church structures was observed during the course of the watching brief. The human remains and coffin fittings were reburied within the service trench following archaeological recording.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: TBA

Figure 1: Site location



Not to scale

Figure 2: Plan showing church and route of service trench

servergo*KIRTMV08*iKIRTMEV*Kirtlington Church*jm*14.05.08

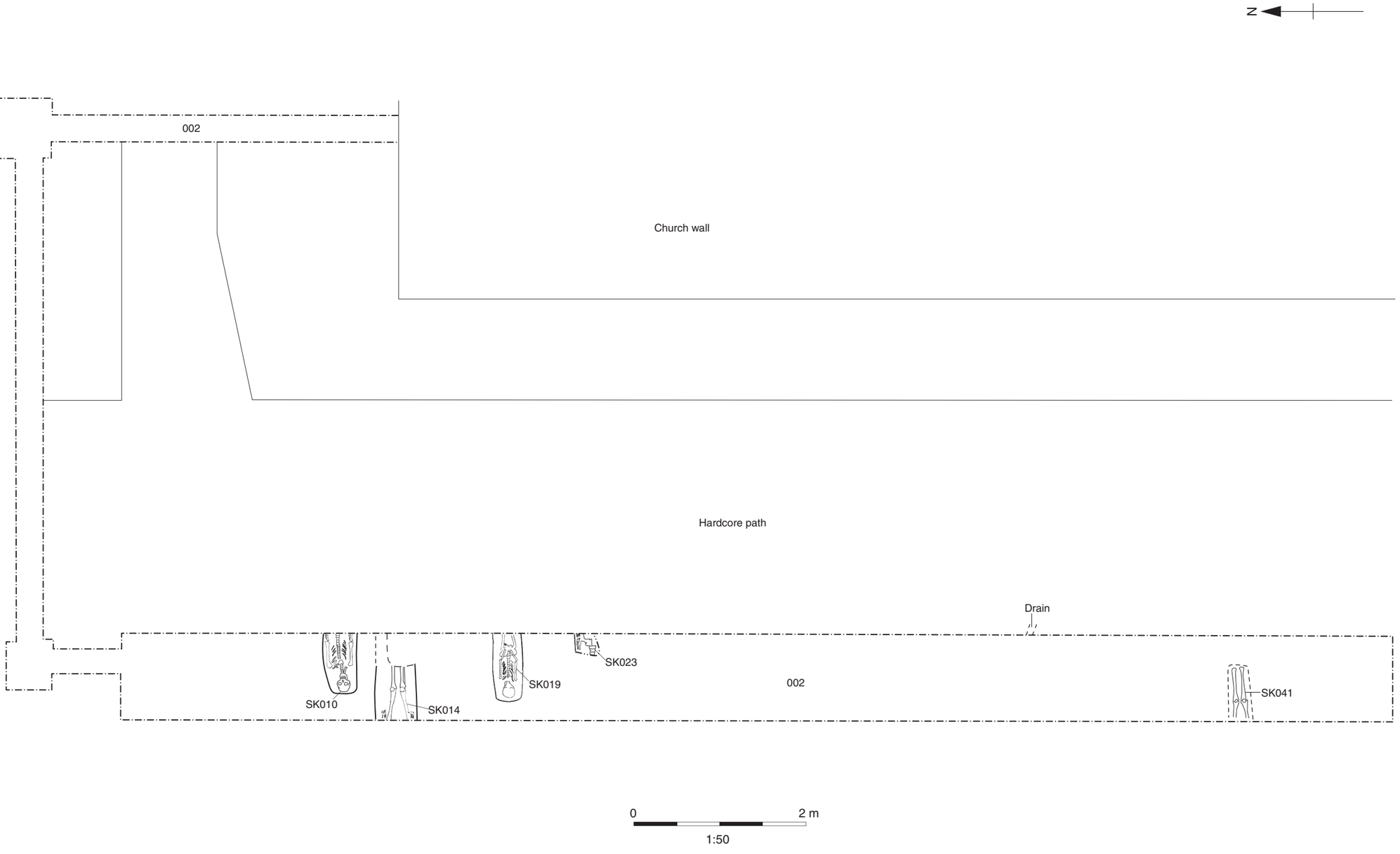


Figure 3b: Overlay to figure 3a showing the location of the earlier burials

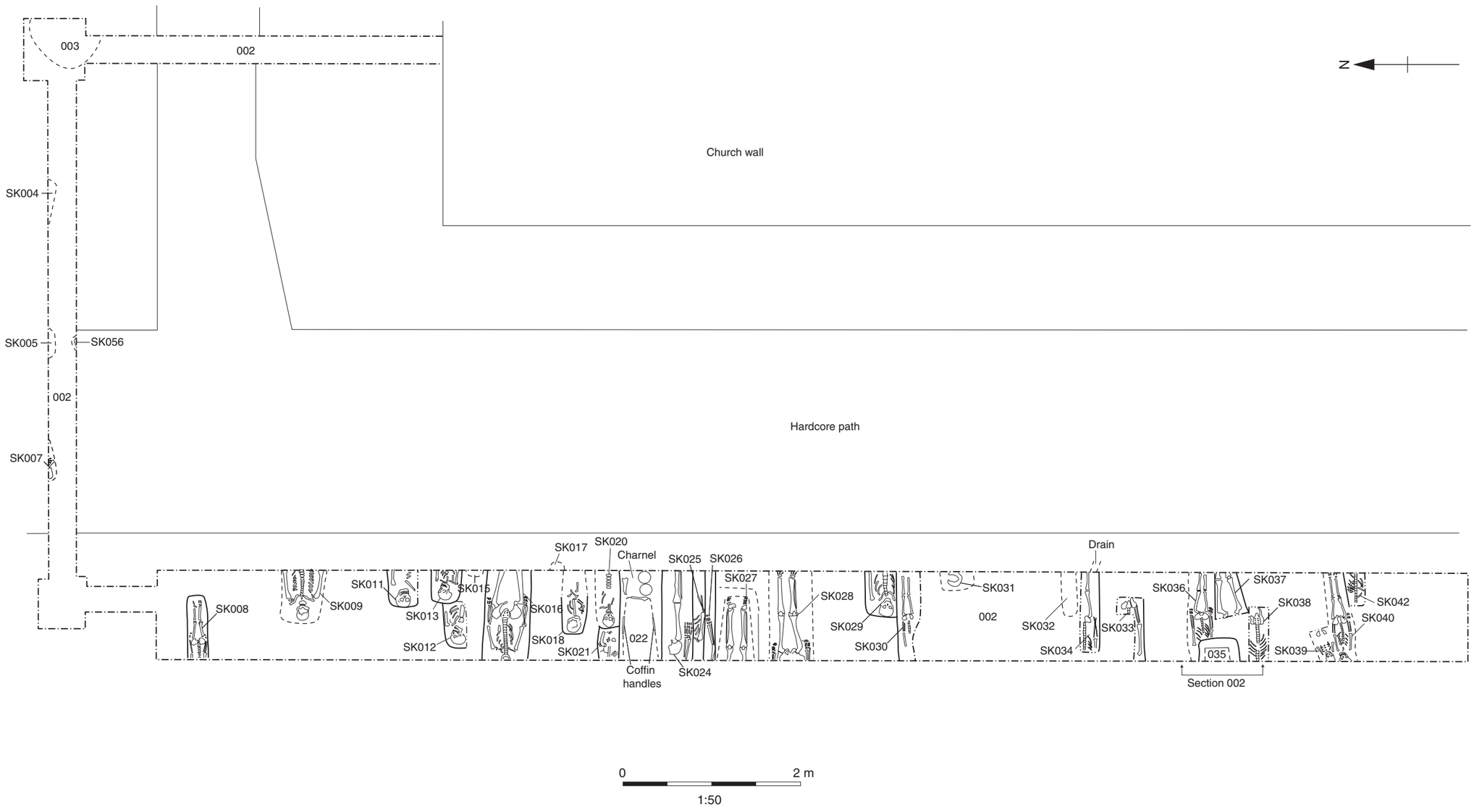


Figure 3a: Plan showing the location of burials

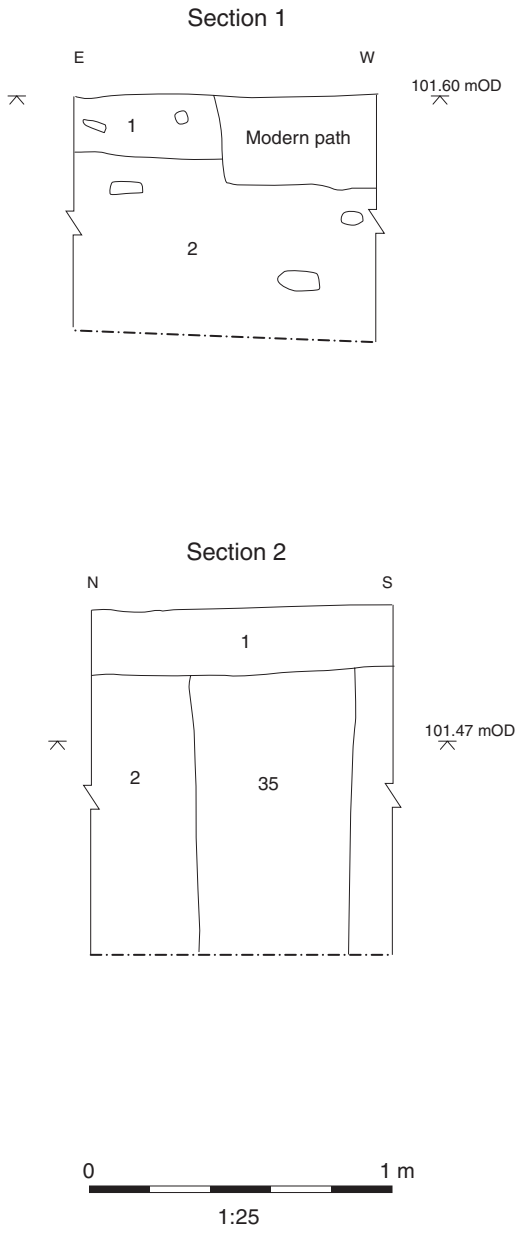


Figure 4: Sections 1 and 2

Plate 1: East-west trench, (looking towards the east)

Plate 2: North-south trench, (looking towards the south)

Plate 3: Working shot of north-south trench, (looking towards the south)

Plate 4: Working shot of SK038 being excavated

Plate 5: Forearm bones of SK009 (broken post mortem) with osteophytosis around the joints for the elbows

Plate 6: Osteophytosis and fusion between the 6th and 7th cervical vertebrae of SK011

Plate 7: Healed trauma on the right tibia of SK024

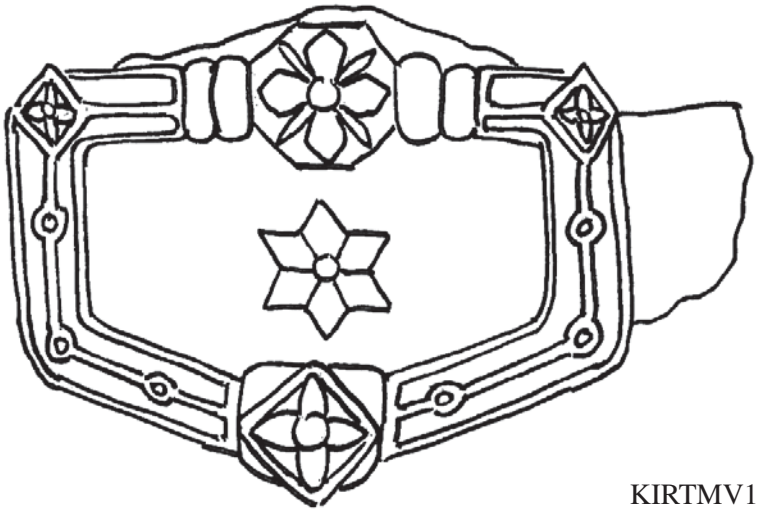
Plate 8: Coffin fittings from coffin 22

Plate 9: Close up of coffin grip and plate, coffin 022

Plate 10: Grip from coffin 035

Plate 11: Writing on coffin plate from coffin 035, (viewed from the reverse side)

Plate 12: Headstone commemorating Thomas and Susannah Hawkes



KIRTMV1

KIRTMV2

Plate 13: New grip styles KIRTMV1 and KIRTMV2