

Dalton Old Church Archaeological Evaluation

Data Structure Report



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Date: 20 November 2013

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was carried out between 28th October and 1st November 2013 at Dalton Old Parish Church, Dumfries (HER ref.12202; NMRS ref. NY17SW 1) by Andrew Nicholson, Dumfries and Galloway Council, on behalf of Neighbourhood Services, Dumfries and Galloway Council in advance of proposed engineering works on the northern boundary wall of the graveyard at the former Dalton Parish Church. The old parish church, churchyard and wall are A-Listed structures (Historic Scotland ref: 3455). In addition the church and a surrounding area, including the churchyard wall to the north, is a Scheduled Monument (Historic Scotland ref: 8676).

The growth of three beech trees immediately east of the burial enclosure on the northern side of the graveyard has caused the boundary wall to be displaced outwards, and caused portions of the outer face of the wall to collapse. Other tree and shrub growth further east has done the same. Dumfries and Galloway Council envisage a programme of works to take down and rebuild the boundary wall, to prevent a catastrophic collapse at a later date if the wall is left untreated.

The evaluation was required to determine the character of the deposits immediately within the graveyard boundary, particularly in respect of the presence of human remains, or stratified archaeological deposits.

Historic Background

Dalton falls within the diocese of Glasgow, in the deanery of Annandale. It is described as a parsonage in Bagimond. The church of Dalton Magna remained unappropriated at the Reformation, the patronage passing in 1552 from Gilbert Grierson of Dalton to Lindsay of Barcloy. In 1609 the parishes of Meikle and Little Dalton were united to Mouswald by Parliament, with Little Dalton as the parish church. In 1615 Mouswald was made the parish church, but in 1633 Meikle and Little Dalton were disjoined from Mouswald and constituted a separate parish. The church is depicted on Jean Blaeu's map of 1654, with the adjacent loch and mill also clearly shown.



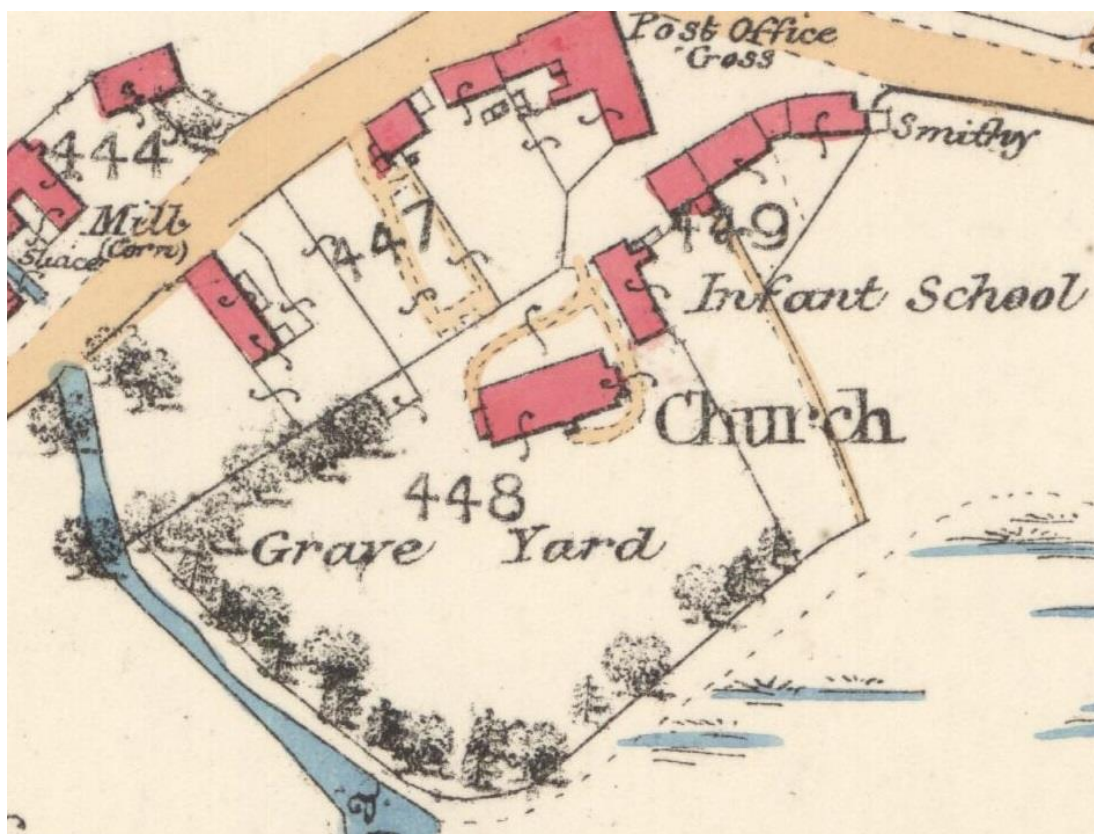
Blaeu's map of 1654

The present church was built in 1894-5, designed by the architect J Dick Peddie. Its predecessor lies ruinous in the churchyard. This earlier church, now roofless, was built in 1704, with three sides on the base of the walls of a previous church. These remains of an earlier church may date from the 13th century, and are shown by a massive plinth or base-course which extends all along the north side of the church, except where it has been cut through for doorways. The 1704 church was built in a Renaissance style, of a much higher quality than most Scottish churches of the time. In addition to the staircases at either end, which led to wooden balconies known as 'lofts', a third smaller staircase from the higher ground to the south led up to a balcony in the middle of the south wall. The pulpit would have been in the middle of the church against the north wall. The ground-floor doors at either end were added in the early 19th century.

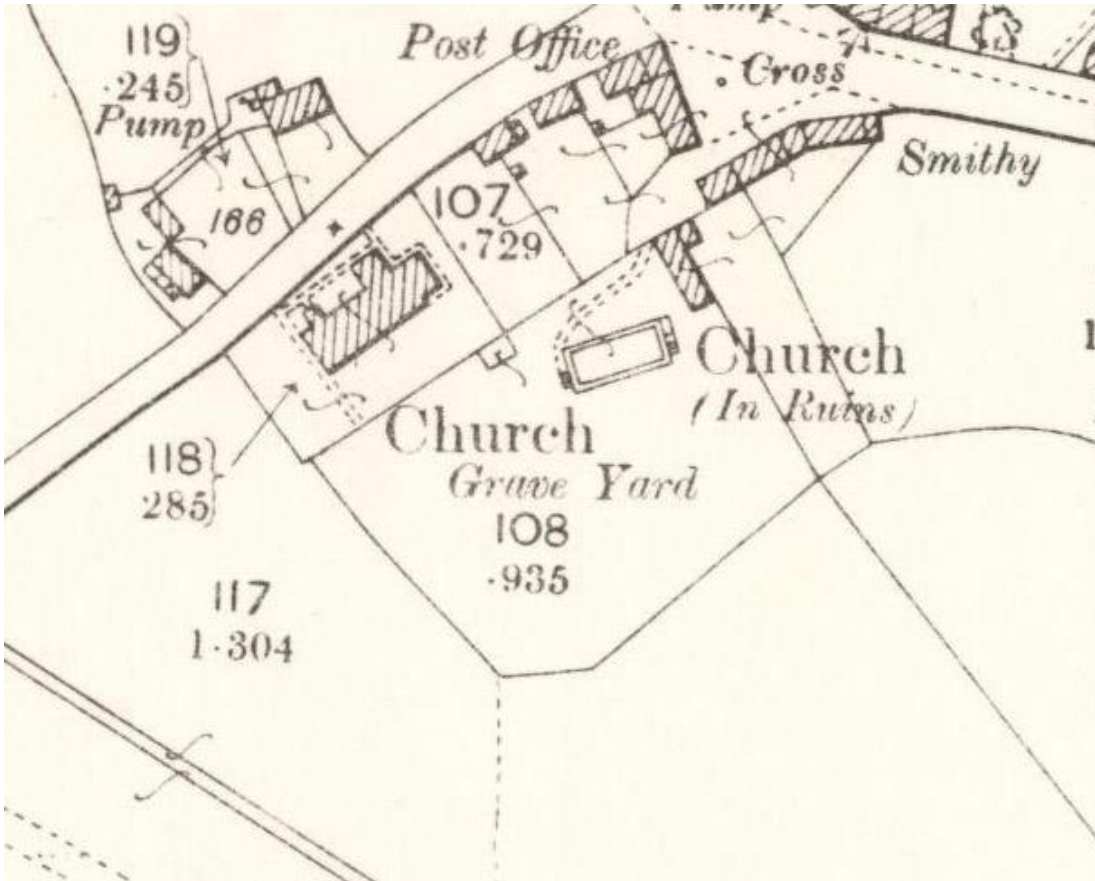
The graveyard around the old parish church includes a 19th century monument to Curruthers of Dormont on its north-eastern boundary. The ruined building in the north-east corner of the graveyard, by the entrance gate, is shown as an infant school on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1858, with a hearse house next door just outside the churchyard. The school is still shown to be in use on the second edition 25" map of 1899. The graveyard includes a fine Georgian burial enclosure, shown against the northern boundary wall on the Ordnance Survey maps, and a late 18th century obelisk to the Carruthers of Whitecroft.

The second Ordnance Survey map shows that Dalton Loch to the east and south of the church was drained in the second half of the 19th century, and the outflow canalized and diverted to the south-west away from the graveyard boundary and the site of the new church.

Despite being shown as straight on the Ordnance Survey maps, there is a slight curve to the northern boundary wall, that has been accentuated in places by displacement from trees and outward pressure from the soil, whose level on the interior of the wall is around 1 – 1.5m above that on the exterior.



First edition Ordnance Survey 25" map 1862



Second edition Ordnance Survey 25" map 1899

Archaeological Background

Previous archaeological work has been confined to the church itself, when it underwent consolidation and restoration in 2009. This work, on the south side of the church, established the base of the steps up to the central southern doorway of the 1704 church, and uncovered a number of pieces of stonework from 17th and 18th century table-tombs, used as backfill for raising up a low kerb against the south wall of the church.

Trench locations



After discussion with Historic Scotland it was agreed that the first trench (A) would be placed within the boundary wall as close as possible to the large beech trees that are causing wall collapse, on their eastern side.



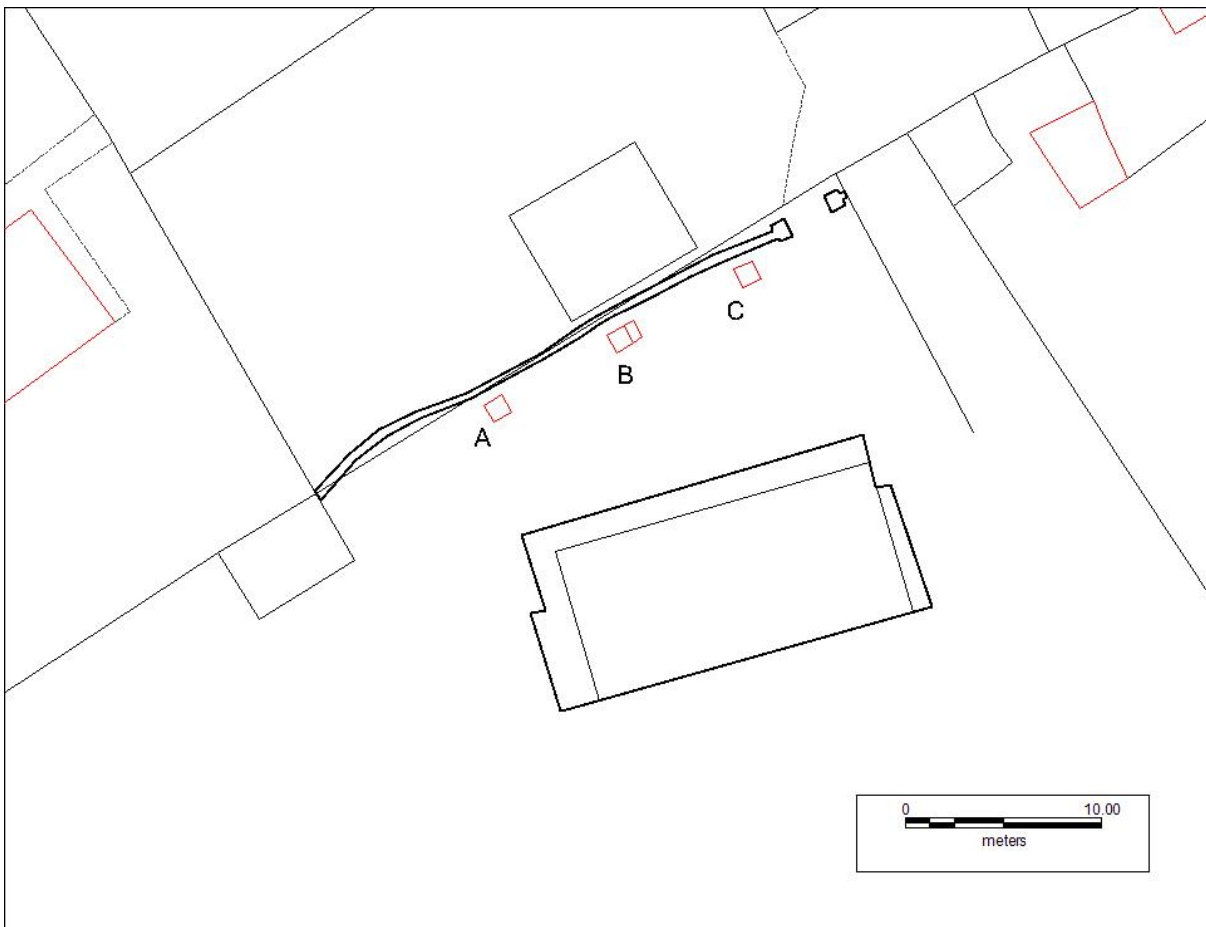
The second trench (B) was located as close as possible to the boundary wall where there is significant collapse adjacent to an external garage.



The third trench (C) was located just to the west of the entrance to the graveyard, to determine the nature of a raised mound at that location.



The presence of a path from the gateway to the western entry to the church, shown on the Ordnance Survey maps, raised the possibility that there would be fewer burials between the path and the wall, and no headstones were visible other than at the western end where two headstones stand between the route of the path, now grassed over, and the boundary wall.



Trench location (with actual line of top of wall and outer edge of church overlain on OS Mastermap)

Findings

Trench A

Removal of the turf revealed a mid-brown subsoil, with larger stones in the northern half of the trench (002). Four pieces of disarticulated bone, possibly human, were uncovered during turf removal. The subsoil extended to a depth of 0.5m in the northern half of the trench, and about 0.35m in the southern half, where a lens of compacted red-brown gravel intruded (003). Below the lens was a similar matrix to the layer above it. The interface between the layers in the southern half of the trench and the more rubble-filled north was hard to determine, as the soil matrices were very similar, and the whole was laced with fibrous roots. At a depth of 0.65m below the surface the two halves of the trench were clearly distinguished, with a compacted rubble layer in the northern half (004), and a much looser soil with only small stones in it in the southern half (005). The looser soil appeared to be the fill of a near-vertical cut through the rubble layer, conforming to the shape of the stones, so in some places undercutting the stone, on others lying over it. The looser soil became siltier as excavation proceeded, and at a depth of 1.05m linear remains of decaying timber were noted (007), along with a coffin fitting from close to the southern edge of the trench, confirming that the cut (008) was for a 19th century grave, and that the timber staining and friable pieces were the remains of the side-wall of a coffin. Careful excavation of the silty soil within the timber staining eventually uncovered an in situ mandible and skull (006) in the south-western corner of the excavation continuing under the sections. In the northern half of the trench the rubble layer (004), which contained redeposited chunks of bedrock with evidence of plough-scores, continued down at least as far as the coffin, so was left unexcavated.



Trench A looking north, showing northern rubble (004)



Trench A looking west, showing skull (006) under south-western section and wood staining from the coffin (007).

Trench B

Cleaning up of the subsoil (011) below the turves revealed that the eastern half of the trench was seriously compromised by the presence of tree roots from an adjacent stump. The decision was taken to offset the trench 0.5m to the west to avoid the worst of the problem and enable a useful depth to be reached. The subsoil includes fragments of Welsh slate and modern brick.



Trench B looking north, showing tree roots below topsoil. The trench was extended half a metre to the west, and work abandoned in the eastern 0.5m.

Below the subsoil a matrix of grey-brown soil with small to medium stones extended downwards for 0.5m (012). Both rounded cobbles and sub-angular sandstone pieces were noted, and as in Trench A there was a tendency for the larger stones to be in the northern half of the trench. The layers were badly affected by tree roots that had rotted, leaving fine silty channels cutting through the deposits and branching in all angles and directions, revealed by sudden voids, and extending under the sections.



Trench B looking east, after removal of (012), showing the stony deposit (013). Note the line of a former tree root shown as a dark silty band.

Below the soil layer lay a stony rubble deposit (013), again riddled with decomposed root channels, presumably from earlier trees along the boundary. Under the rubble the soil matrix took on a redder hue, becoming considerably less stony and with fewer finds (014). A single lead alloy button with a broken copper alloy attachment loop at the rear was found at the interface between 013 and 014, and can be dated to the later half of the 18th century.

Layer 014 continued down for a further 0.25 – 0.3m, before coming down onto a brownish red layer of pea grit and gravel that was highest in the south-western corner and sloped downwards to north and east (015). This deposit appeared to be a possible natural deposit, so a small test sondage was cut in the north-western corner, showing that the layer continued for at least another 0.2m in depth. As the trench was now 1.15m below ground level and appeared to have reached natural work was terminated in the trench.

Trench C

The upper layer of the trench comprised a very loose dark grey-brown soil amidst a large quantity of rounded cobbles (016), with quantities of modern pottery and glass. It is perhaps indicative of the removal and dumping of a cobbled surface, perhaps associated with the demolition of the school in the early 20th century. It was 0.2m deep in the southern part of the trench, sloping to 0.35m deep at the northern edge where there was much loose stone and voiding. The layer below (017) contained quantities of broken roofing slate, both Cumbrian blue slate and Welsh purple slate, sheet window glass and 19th and 20th century pottery. Some of the pottery sherds appear to belong to the same vessel as some sherds from 016, suggesting the deposits are broadly contemporaneous. The soil matrix was slightly lighter in colour than layer 016, but also contained a lot of stone rubble, especially along the northern section.

Below the rubble layers was a red-brown sandy soil (018) with only a few small stones. Some modern glass was apparent in the upper part of the layer, but the lower half of this thick deposit, some 0.4 – 0.5m deep, was free of finds, and may indicate a slow soil accumulation over a number of years. Root channels, similar to those from trench B, appeared throughout this layer, though they had not been present in the layers above.

A band of rounded cobbles (019) appeared in the southern part of the trench, with a distinct, arcing northern edge. However the silty soil to the north (020) appeared to be identical to layer 018 that overlay the cobbles, and continued downwards.



Trench C looking north, showing cobble layer (019) with silty soil (020). Note the loose stone (016) in the upper part of the north section.

Removal of the cobbles and silty soil uncovered a stony layer, with sub-angular and rounded stones (021) set in a matrix of slightly sandy grey-brown soil. This deposit continued down for over 0.4m, and was still continuing when work was stopped at the maximum safe working depth of 1.2m. It contained a number of pieces of disarticulated human skeletal material including eight easily identifiable neurocranial fragments, a portion of juvenile or sub-adult maxilla, and several phalanges. In agreement with Historic Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway Council these were cleaned and photographed, then bagged and redeposited into Trench C prior to backfilling. Other finds will be deposited with the Council's museum service.

Recommendations

It would appear from the remains uncovered in Trenches A and B that rubble deposits, possibly relating to the original construction of the boundary wall, extend up to 0.6m into the graveyard from the interior face of the wall, and to a depth of at least 1.1m from the current interior ground surface. It should therefore be possible to take down the western half of the wall without serious detriment to archaeological deposits, and with minimal chance of disturbing in situ human remains.

At the eastern end of the wall, around the gateway and the raised mound to the west, the evidence from Trench C indicates that in situ archaeological deposits, including disarticulated human remains, could extend right up to the boundary wall. An archaeological watch brief would be recommended during the downcutting phase of works in this area, to record any features uncovered and to deal with any associated finds.

Conclusions

Excavation of three 1m square trenches set just within the northern boundary wall of Dalton Old Parish Church revealed a sequence of deposits, mostly of stony dumped material, adjacent to the wall. The westernmost trench revealed the existence of a 19th century burial, aligned west-east, whose northernmost edge of the grave cut is about 0.9m in from the boundary wall; the central trench located only dumped deposits of 18th century or later date lying above natural sand and gravel, whilst the eastern trench located archaeological deposits of potential late or post medieval date at a depth of around 0.8m, below 19th century dumped deposits.

Appendix A.

List of Contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Description</i>
001	A	Topsoil and turf
002	A	Mid-brown slightly silty soil, subsoil/
003	A	Red-brown sandy gravel in southern half of trench
004	A	Compacted rubble, including redeposited bedrock
005	A	Loose dark brown soil with small stones
006	A	Skeleton
007	A	Remains of coffin
008	A	Grave cut
009	B	Topsoil and turf; dark grey-brown sandy soil
010	B	Lens of red-brown sandy soil
011	B	Grey-brown silty soil; subsoil
012	B	Grey-brown silty soil with many angular stones
013	B	Rounded and subangular stone rubble in grey-brown soil matrix
014	B	Mid grey-brown silty soil with occasional stone
015	B	Red-brown sandy matrix with gravel and pea-grit
016	C	Grey-black soil with small cobbles
017	C	Friable grey-brown silty soil with stones and slate
018	C	Red-brown sandy soil with small stones
019	C	Rounded cobbles in S of trench
020	C	Grey-brown sandy soil with stones
021	C	Stony deposit in grey-brown sandy soil matrix

Appendix B

Photographic Log

Photo No.	Description	Taken From
DSCF5257	Trench A after topsoil removal	SE
DSCF5258	Stony layer 002	S
DSCF5259	Stony layer 002 and gravel layer 003	E
DSCF5260	Stony layer 004 after removal of 002	E
DSCF5261	Stony layer 004 after removal of 002	S
DSCF5262	004 and 005 after removal of 003	E
DSCF5263	004 and 005 after removal of 003	N

DSCF5265**	Stony deposit 004 after partial removal of 005	S
DSCF5266	Stony deposit 004 after partial removal of 005	S
DSCF5267**	Stony deposit 004 after partial removal of 005	S
DSCF5268**	Stony deposit 004 after partial removal of 005	W
DSCF5269	Stony deposit 004 after removal of 005	E
DSCF5270	Stony deposit 004 after removal of 005	S
DSCF5271	Stony deposit 004 after removal of 005	S
DSCF5272	Grave cut 008, coffin staining 007, skull 006 and rubble layer 004	E
DSCF5274	Grave cut 008, coffin staining 007 and skull 006	E
DSCF5275	Grave cut 008, coffin staining 007 and skull 006	E
DSCF5277	Close up of skull 006	E
DSCF5278	Trench B after removal of turf	S
DSCF5279	Trench B after removal of turf	W
DSCF5280	Subsoil 011, showing tree roots	S
DSCF5281	Subsoil 011, showing tree roots	W
DSCF5282	Layer 012 showing root cavities	S
DSCF5283	Layer 012 showing root cavities	W
DSCF5284	Rubble layer 013	S
DSCF5285	Rubble layer 013	W
DSCF5286	Rubble layer 013	W
DSCF5287**	Rubble layer 013	W
DSCF5288**	Rubble layer 013	S
DSCF5289	Rubble layer 013	W
DSCF5290	Top of 014 after removal of 013, showing root	S
DSCF5291	Top of 014 after removal of 013, showing root	W
DSCF5292	Top of 015	S
DSCF5293	Top of 015	W
DSCF5294	015 showing sondage in NW corner	S
DSCF5295	Trench C after turf removal, showing 016	S
DSCF5296	Silty layer 017, with stones of 016 visible in section	S
DSCF5297	Silty layer 017, with stones of 016 visible in section	E
DSCF5298	Silty deposit 018	S
DSCF5299	Cobbles 019 and silty deposit 020	S
DSCF5300	Cobbles 019 and silty deposit 020	E
DSCF5301	Top of stony layer 021	S
DSCF5302	Top of stony layer 021	W
DSCF5303	Base of excavation, in layer 021	N
DSCF5304	Base of excavation, in layer 021	N
DSCF5305	Base of excavation, in layer 021	E
DSCF5306	Trench C, showing location	SW
DSCF5307	Trench C, showing location	SW
DSCF5308	Trench B, after backfilling, showing location	SE
DSCF5309	Trench B, after backfilling, showing location	SW
DSCF5310	Trench A, after backfilling, showing location	SE
DSCF5314	Neurocranial pieces from 021	
DSCF5315	Neurocranial pieces from 021	
DSCF5316	Phalanges and other bone from 021	
DSCF5317	Close up of maxillary pieces from 021	
DSCF5318	Close up of maxillary pieces from 021	
DSCF5319	Other bone from 021	
DSCF5320**	Other bone from 021	
DSCF5351	Finds from 016	

DSCF5352	Finds from 016	
DSCF5353	Finds from 017	
DSCF5354	Finds from 018	
DSCF5355	Finds from 013	
DSCF5356	Finds from 013	
DSCF5357	Finds from 013	
DSCF5358	Finds from 005	
DSCF5359	Finds from 005	
DSCF5362**	Close up of coffin fragment from 005 showing textile	
DSCF5263	Mortar pieces from 021	
DSCF5264	Mortar pieces from 021	
DSCF5365	Coffin fitting - exterior	
DSCF5366	Coffin fitting - exterior	
DSCF5367**	Coffin fitting - exterior	
DSCF5368**	Coffin fitting – interior, with timber and cloth	
DSCF5370	Coffin fitting – interior, with timber and cloth	
DSCF5371	Coffin fitting – interior, with timber and cloth	
DSCF5372	Close up of textile on interior of coffin fitting	
DSCF5376	Finds from 001	

*** Image taken using flash due to low light conditions*

Appendix C

Finds Log

Context No.	Description
001	POTTERY: 2 sherds blue-and-white ware BONE: 4 pieces, possibly including human
005	GLASS: 4 shards window glass; 1 shard green bottle glass STONE: 1 piece blue slate with broken nail in situ; 1 piece burnt stone IRON: 4 pieces of thin plate, probably coffin fitting fragments, at least one with textile on interior
007	IRON: 1 sub-triangular coffin fitting, much corroded, with timber and cloth on the interior
013	GLASS: 1 shard blown green bottle glass LEAD ALLOY: 1 button, 27mm dia. Hammered front surface, broken copper alloy loop to rear
016	POTTERY: 18 sherds IRON: 1 handle BONE: 1 fragment GLASS: 2 shards window glass; one shard modern vessel glass
017	POTTERY: 5 sherds CLAY: 2 halves of blue/green stopper/marble IRON: 3 pieces, including 1 nail and 1 wall bracket
018	STONE: 1 piece burnt stone GLASS: 1 shard blown green bottle glass BONE: 1 phalange, probably human
021	BONE: 33 pieces, including human MORTAR: 2 chunks off-white mortar