

Archaeological Watching Brief
Orwell Church
Milnathort

MJ03



ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ORWELL CHURCH
MILNATHORT

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ABSTRACT

Alder Archaeology conducted a watching brief (MJ03) on installation of a new electricity supply to Orwell Church, Milnathort. This involved digging a cable trench from the E gable end of the church, along the S face and down the central path through the churchyard to the public road. The church was built on a new site in 1739, with the churchyard laid out much as it is today. As a result, no undocumented structures or burials were found. However the church foundations, and successive path surfaces were exposed, and one burial was located only 0.5 m below the surface.

The watching brief took place on 30th March 2021, and was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks commissioned Alder Archaeology to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the installation of a new electricity supply cable at Orwell Church, Milnathort, NGR NO 12004 05010.

The work was carried out on 30th March 2021 in dry, partly cloudy conditions. The requirement was to carry out a watching brief on the digging of a cable trench from the public road, through the centre of the churchyard, and round to an opening in the E gable wall of the church. Special attention was to be paid to possible disturbance of graves.

This programme of archaeological works was designed to satisfy guidance provided to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks as Statutory Undertaker, provided by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust as archaeological curator, on 19th January 2021.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this investigation was to locate and record any archaeological finds or features exposed or disturbed by the works, especially burials, and to help guide the works so as to minimise avoidable disturbance.

1.3 Reporting

The present document has been prepared as the final report on this watching brief. Copies will be sent to the client, The National Record of the Historic Environment at Historic Environment Scotland, and Perth and Kinross Historic Environment Record.

1.4 Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Lorna Williamson of Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, and Sophie Nicol of Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust help and guidance. The work has been funded by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.

2 Details of Work

2.1 The Site (Illus 1)

Orwell Church is B-listed (LB17632) and is located on the N edge of Milnathort, on the N side of an E – W road called Ba' Hill. This was presumably also the name of the high ground on which the church stands. The present church was built in 1729 to replace an earlier church on the N shore of Loch Leven, located some 3 km to the ESE and now in ruins. The church seems to have been modified and heightened in the 1880s. This can be seen, for example in a change of build in the S wall, level with the spring of the arched windows.

The present church is T-shaped, with the main, horizontal bar aligned E – W, and the vertical stroke of the T to the N. The church stands on high ground, with a commanding view of Milnathort to the S. To the S of Ba' Hill, the ground slopes down quite steeply, forming a small public park of mown grass, with occasional trees. This

gives the church a most imposing skyline setting for such a modest scale of building, albeit at the cost of giving the parishioners rather a steep uphill walk on a Sunday morning.

The church is surrounded by a burial ground, with a central path aligned N – S from Ba' Hill to the S facade of the church, where it branches out, E and W, to lead to entrance doors at the E and W ends of the facade. The church and path appear much as now on the Ordnance Survey of 1869. The burial ground is spacious and well laid out, and marks an interesting, early 18th-century transition between the crowded, jumbled, chaotic character of the traditional country kirkyard, and the formal, structured tidiness of the typical Victorian cemetery. It also quite different from the consciously dramatic, romantic, landscape composition of mainly early 19-century Necropolis design, seen for example in Glasgow, Stirling and Dundee, in which Scotland played such a notable part. The Orwell burial ground was originally symmetrical, but has been extended to the E in modern times. On the Ba' Hall frontage, just W of the entrance gate, there is a small session house and cottage.

The main central path from the front gate to the church is paved with a thin layer of tarmac, which extends also along the S face of the church. The path beside the E gable end is paved with crushed stone chips.

In 2020, a small stone-built lean-to extension at the N T-end of the church was demolished, and replaced with a substantial modern extension to provide a vestry, toilet and accessible entrance. This work was the subject of a standing building record and watching brief by Derek Hall, and found disarticulated human remains at a depth of about 1.2 metres. These were reburied on site close to where they had been found.

Subsequent to this, a major refurbishment of the church interior has been undertaken, including the present renewal of the electricity supply. This involved laying a new supply cable in trench from the entrance gate on Ba' Hill, up the E side of the central path to the S front of the church, then turning E along the S face of the church, and finally N to terminate in a pit dug against the E gable wall.

2.2 Archaeological Potential

As the present, 1729 church was built on a new site, 3 km away from the previous church, there was a reasonable though not sure and certain hope that the work would not be complicated by undocumented structures and burials in unexpected places, as often happens in older parish kirkyards. The central path, the E and W doors, and the paths leading to them all seem to be part of the original fabric and layout of the church and burial ground. This being so, it was hoped that the cable trenches, confined to the existing paths, would not cut through large numbers of undisturbed burials. Nevertheless, there was the possibility of unexpected or redeposited material. In addition, there was the possibility that the parts of the trench close to the church would expose and perhaps pass through the foundations of the existing building, as happened in the previous work in 2020, and this also would be of interest.

2.3 Archaeological Method

Work began at the E gable end of the church. A small pit was opened up N of the centre of the gable to expose the wall foundation 06, and make an opening through the wall to feed the new cables into the church. The pit was 1.3 m long by 1 m wide and 0.9

m deep. From this pit, a cable track 0.3 m wide and about 0.45 m deep was dug by micro-excavator, about 0.8 m out from the church wall, S to the SW corner of the church, W along the S edge of the path (1.6 m out) to the centre of the church, and then S along the E edge of the central path, all the way to the entrance gate on Ba' Hall. There it passed through the gate, and joined up with an E – W trench dug along the outside face of the churchyard wall. The digging of the trench was continuously monitored by an archaeologist, recorded and photographed in stages as work proceeded. Details are recorded in the Context and Photographic Registers below. What follows is a summary of the results.

When the trench excavation was completed, the opportunity was taken to photograph various views of the church and its setting, including details of interesting historic features in the churchyard.

2.4 Results of Investigations

At the E gable end of the church, the path was made of modern stone chips (02) over a red clay loam. In the initial pit the wall foundation (01) was 0.6 m deep. Beside it was an older cable duct, and a red clay field drain, perhaps inserted to dry out the ground around the wall foundation.

From the SE corner of the church onwards, the path was surfaced with a layer of tarmac (03), 2 – 3 cm thick. From about the E door of the church, a red sand and gravel natural layer (04) appeared in the bottom of the trench. This continued almost to the S end of the central path. At 2 m S on the central path, natural (04) rises almost to the surface of the path. At 10 m S, it is about 0.2 m down. As the path along the S face of the church reached the centre of the building, red sandstone slabs (05) appeared under the tarmac (03), evidently an earlier path surface. A similar surface of thick buff sandstone slabs (06) appeared at intervals under the central N – S path.

Although contained within the tarmac path (03), rather than in the grass beyond, where the cable track turned S to join the central N – S path, it ran very close to the edge of the path, almost clipping the corner of the grass. Here some fragments of human bone were found, and immediately reburied. Evidently the burials are squeezed very tightly up to the path edge, though apparently not beyond it; no other bones were found in the course of the excavation. It is curious that these bones were found only 0.5 m below the present surface. Perhaps in the 18th century, the later 'six feet under' convention had not yet been established, especially where later burials were being added in an established family lair.

As the cable track continued down the central N – S path, it exposed but did not break an E – W lighting cable (07) about 0.2 m down, running towards one of the floodlights installed amongst the gravestones on the S side of the church.

About 10 m N of the main entrance gate, the slabs, loam and natural deposits under the tarmac all gave way to a deep deposit of large, coarse rounded cobbles (08), which continued for about 2 – 3 m, stopping about 7 m N of the Ba' Hill boundary wall. This would not have been another path surface, as it would have been very difficult and dangerous for pedestrians, like walking on a cobble beach. The path and churchyard slope down steeply N – S, and could have been awash with surface water during wet weather. The cobbles (08) could have served as a soakaway under the path surface,

preventing a deep puddle from forming at the entrance gate, or a torrent of rainwater flowing out into the street beyond.

South of the cobbles (08) and down to the entrance gate the trench bottomed on coarse buff sand (09), either a change in natural or an artificial bedding layer under the path and gate threshold. In this area the cable trench was crossed by a lead water pipe supplying the cottage, and joined by very short spur trench to carry a new electricity supply cable to the cottage.

3 Interpretation

The excavation of the cable trench showed that the church stands on the sand and gravel layers of Ba' Hill, probably a glacial feature, and probably quite well drained. As expected, there were no surprising burials or structures encroaching on the central path or the original church foundations, though at least some of the burials were shallower than might have been expected. The layout of the church and churchyard seems to be still more or less as planned in 1729. The surface of the path has undergone a change from sandstone slabs to a tarmac layer, perhaps to provide a suitable smooth and flat surface, free of the trip hazards that form as stone slab surfaces settle into relatively uncompacted ground.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

No further excavations are required in connection with the present works. It appears that the established central path is free of burials and structures, apart from the path surfaces, and therefore a good choice for any future service tracks if required. The burials, though well laid out, can lie as close as 0.5 m to the surface, and this should be borne in mind if any works are required amongst the graves, for example if the lighting system is to be renewed in the future.

5 Bibliography

Hall, D W 2020 Standing Building Survey and Watching Brief, Orwell and Milnathort Church, Milnathort, Perth and Kinross. Unpublished grey literature, Perth.

Appendix 1 Context Register

<i>No</i>	<i>Description</i>
01	Church foundation seen in initial pit, E gable wall. 0.6 m deep.
02	Path surface of modern stone chips over red clay loam at E gable end.
03	Tarmac path surface, 2 – 3 cm thick, from SE corner of church to Ba' Hill entrance gate.
04	Red sand and gravel natural, exposed in front of church E door, 0.5 m down. Appears elsewhere to S, generally 0.5 m down. At 2 m S of path corner, natural rises almost to surface. At 10 m S natural about 0.2 m down.

<i>No</i>	<i>Description</i>
05	Red sandstone slabs appearing under tarmac towards centre of church.
06	Thick buff sandstone slabs, appear under N - S path.
07	An existing lighting cable appears, running E-W, 0.2 m down under central path.
08	C 10 m N of street, all deposits replaced by coarse cobbles. Soakaway? Stops after 2 m. About 7 m N of boundary wall on Ba' Hill.
09	Natural changes to buff sand at entrance gate on Ba' Hill.

Appendix 2 Photographic Register

<i>No</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>View</i>
01 – 3	Orwell Church sign, facing Ba' Hill. Church behind. Cottage to L of entrance. External works along footpath in foreground.	N
04	Church, centre of S elevation. Sundial and date stone, 1729. Change of build near spring of arched windows suggests wall heightened.	N
05	East gable end. Round-headed gallery window slightly off centre. Cable access pit against gable wall, slightly N of centre, hidden by headstone.	W
06	Detail of headstone. John Thomson, [?] 1824.	W
07	Cable access pit, with wall foundation 01 pierced by black plastic cable duct.	W
08	Cable access pit dug in gravel path, with new cable duct laid out beside path.	S
09 – 10	Cable access pit with 1 m scales. Black plastic duct pierces wall foundation. Red clay field drain above.	W
11	Cable access pit with 1 m scales. Black plastic duct pierces wall foundation 01. Red clay field drain above. Older duct below.	S
12	Digging new cable track in gravel path 02, beside E gable.	S
13	Detail of cable access pit. Black plastic duct pierces wall foundation 01. Red clay field drain above.	W
14 – 15	Digging new cable track in gravel path 02, beside E gable. Reaching SE corner.	S
16 - 18	Turning SE corner. Proceeding W along S edge of path.	W
19	Track dug beside E gable.	N
20	Track passing W in front of SE door.	W
21	Track passing W in front of SE door.	N
22	Detail of track passing W in front of SE door. Red gravel and sand natural 04 in trench	N

	base.	
23	Track continuing W along S edge of path.	W
24	Track arriving at centre of church. E – W path meets N – S path. Red sandstone slabs 05 under tarmac path.	W
25 – 6	Track approaching S end of N – S path. Cobble soakaway 08 in section.	W
27	Track runs along E edge of N – S path. View up to church.	N
28	Detail of cobble soakaway 08 in section near S end of track.	NNW
29 – 30	S of soakaway 08, natural in bottom of track changes from red gravel to brown sand 09. Cottage and portaloos beyond.	W
31	Track runs along E edge of N – S path. View up to church.	N
32	Detail of bellcote on apex of W gable. Slates in diminishing courses.	NW
33 – 4	General view of church, S elevation.	N
35 – 6	Detail of branch track to cottage, E gable wall and entrance gate pillar.	W
37 – 8	S end of track passing through entrance gate. Track to cottage branches on R. Lead water pipe crosses track.	S
39	Church hall W of cottage, S elevation facing Ba' Hill.	N
40	Detail of ventilator on hall roof.	N
41	Cottage, S elevation facing Ba' Hill. Slates in diminishing courses. Access ramp in foreground.	N
42	Church on top of hill. External cable track in front of graveyard wall facing Ba' Hill.	N
43	View from bottom of Ba' Hill. Church on top. Tipper with clamshell grab ready to fill external cable track.	N
44 – 5	Central track along E side of N – S path complete. Meets external track at graveyard entrance gate.	N
46	Detail, central track meets external track. E gatepost of entrance.	N
47	Detail, track at SE corner of church. Gravel path beside E gable gives way to tarmac along S elevation.	W
48	Detail, track from SE corner of church to access pit beside E gable wall. Gravel path 02 beside E gable gives way to tarmac 03 along S elevation.	N
49	N elevation of church, with new (2020) extension, awaiting stone cladding.	S
50	N elevation of church, with new (2020) extension, awaiting stone cladding.	SSE
51 – 2	W gable with off-centre gallery window and apex bellcote.	E
53	Detail of bellcote.	E

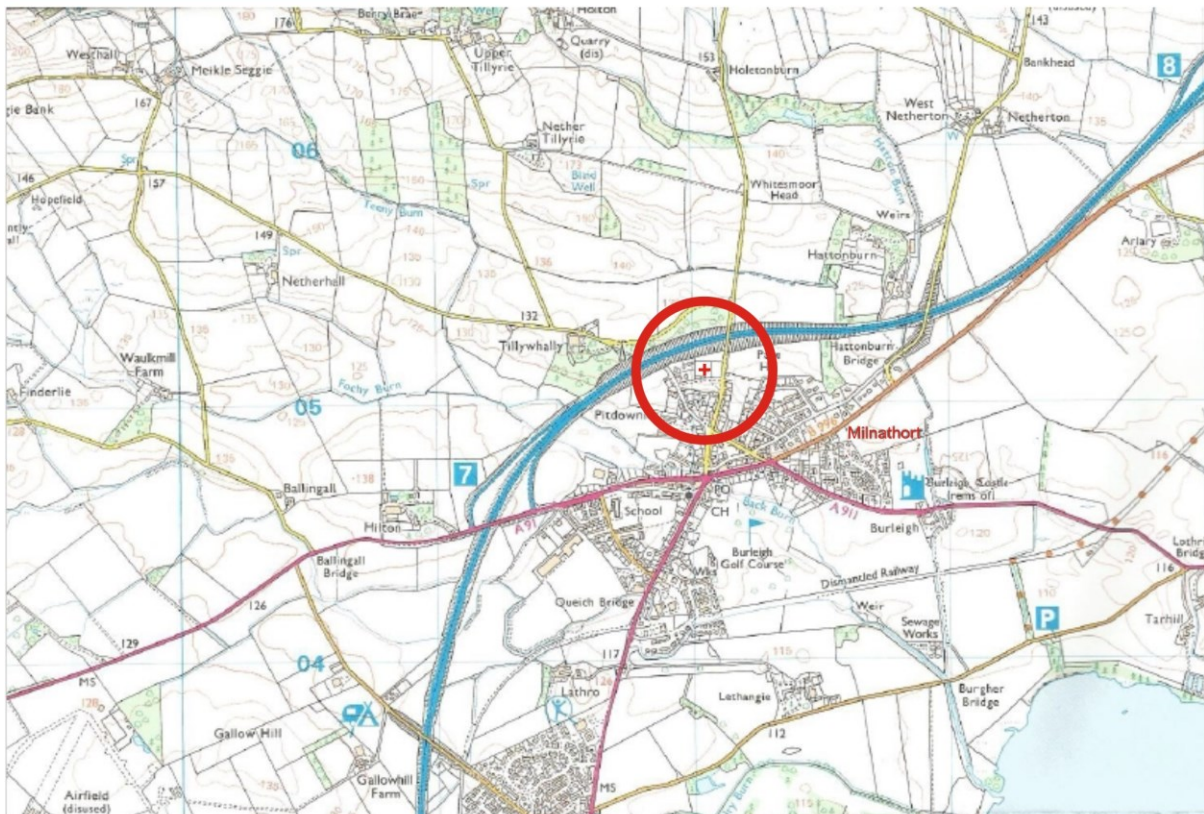
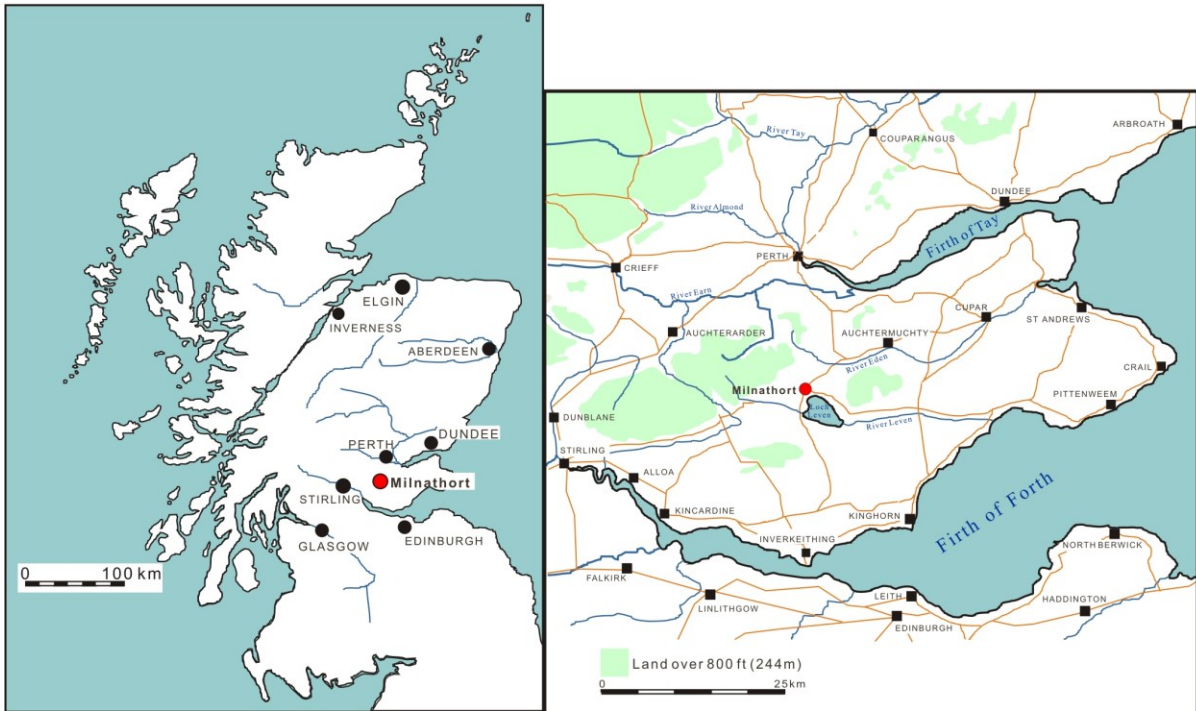
54	Church hall, N elevation. Monuments at W end.	S
55 – 6	Urn and mourner statue.	S
57 - 9	Mourner, relief panel. John Thomson, 1835.	S
60	Detail, panel from statue. Illegible.	W
61	Detail, face of statue.	S
62 – 3	Detail, track along S wall of church turns S to central path. Slightly clips corner of graveyard.	ESE
64 – 5	Central track completed, cable inserted under existing lead pipe. Duct to follow.	N

Appendix 3 Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Perth and Kinross
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Orwell Church, Milnathort.
PROJECT CODE:	MJ03
PARISH:	Orwell
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	David Bowler
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Alder Archaeology Ltd
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	LB17632
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Church. Burial Ground
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	-
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NO 12004 05010
START DATE (this season)	30 March 2021
END DATE (this season)	30 March 2021
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	Standing Building Survey and WB. D W Hall, 2020
MAIN DESCRIPTION: (NARRATIVE) (May include information from other fields)	<p>Alder Archaeology conducted a watching brief (MJ03) on installation of a new electricity supply to Orwell Church, Milnathort. This involved digging a cable trench from the E gable end of the church, along the S face and down the central path through the churchyard to the public road. The church was built on a new site in 1739, with the churchyard laid out much as it is today. As a result, no undocumented structures or burials were found. However the church foundations, and successive path surfaces were exposed, and one burial was located only 0.5 m below the surface.</p> <p>The watching brief took place on 30th March 2021, and was commissioned by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	n/a
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	Alder Archaeology Ltd, 55 South Methven Street, Perth PH1 5NX
EMAIL ADDRESS:	director@alderarchaeology.co.uk
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	HES (intended)

Orwell Church, Milnathort Location

Illus 1



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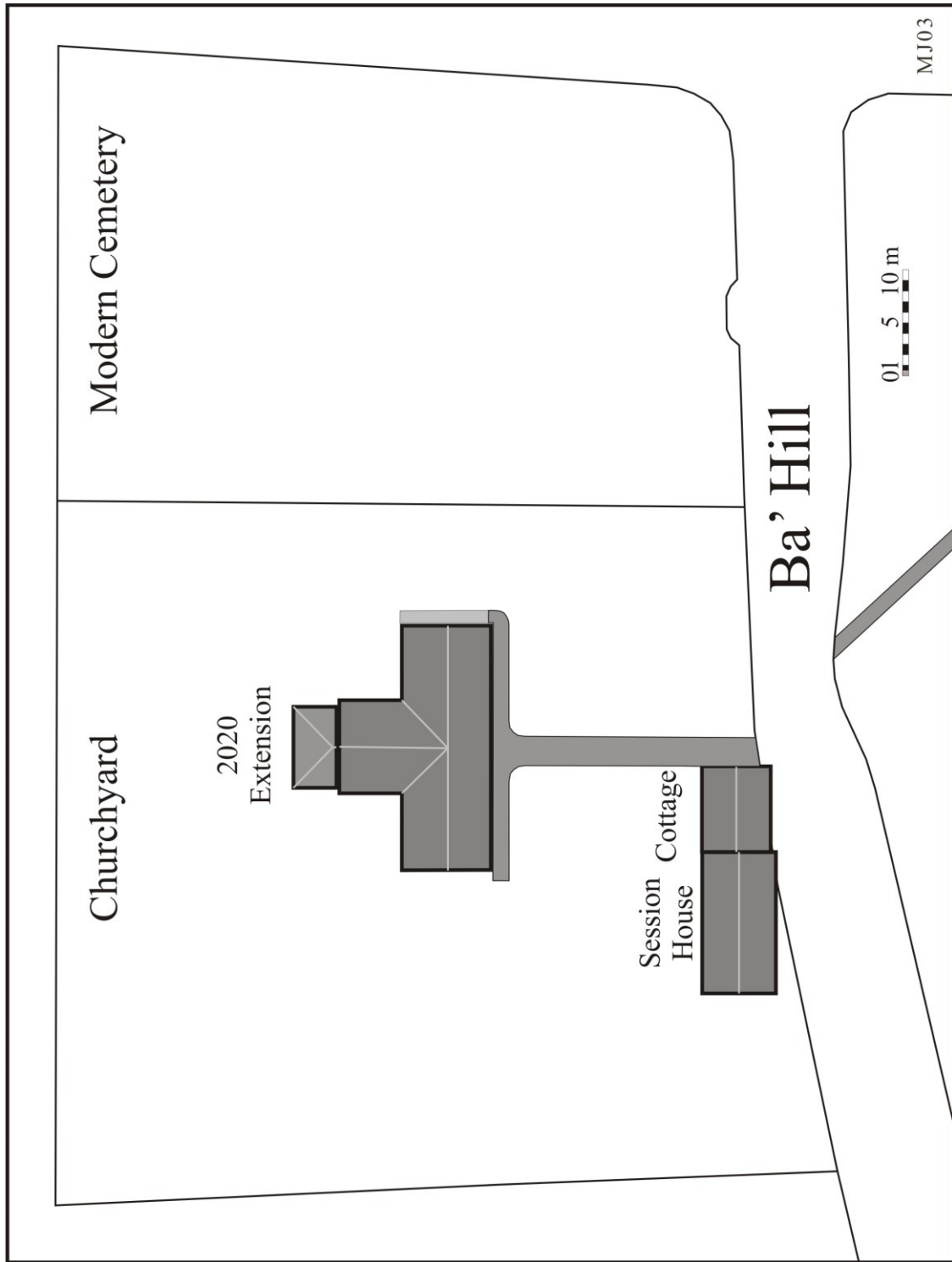
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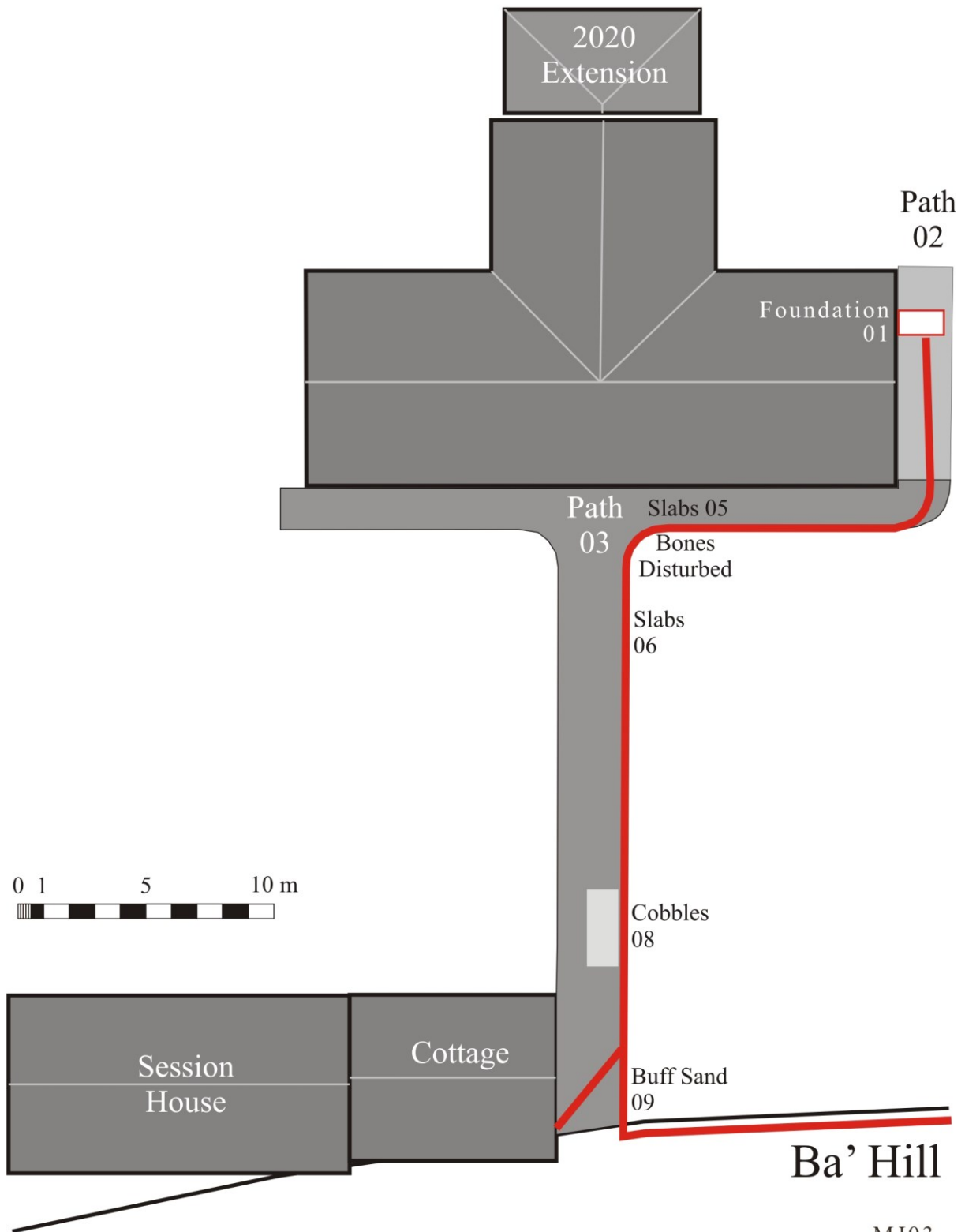
Orwell Church, Milnathort Site Plan

Illus 2



Orwell Church, Milnathort Cable Trench

Illus 3





Illus 4 Church on top of Ba' Hill



Illus 7 Joining central path. Slabs (05)



Illus 5 Initial pit beside E gable



Illus 8 Trench turns S (looking E)



Illus 6 Trench turns W beside E door



Illus 9 Cobbles (08) near S end of path



Illus 10 Trench arrives at entrance gate.
Branch to cottage



Illus 11 Trench complete, looking N