

# Ambrey Archaeology Ltd

## Archaeological Watching Brief at St Peter's Church, Bushley, Worcestershire

Version 1

Event No: WSM78630

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## Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Ambrey Archaeology of groundworks at St Peter's Church Bushley, Worcestershire (NGR SO 87483 34354).

It was undertaken on behalf of Andrea Burton of Nick Joyce Architects whose client, the Rural Deanery of Upton upon Severn, were granted permission under a Faculty from the Diocese of Worcester (ref. 2021-064825) for the excavation of an existing gully and drain and installation of drainage soakaway across a grassy pathway in the churchyard to the north of the church.

The Church of St Peter's is a Grade II listed building, built in 1843 to replace a previous church which is thought to have been built in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It stands in a cluster of listed buildings representing the historic core of the village.

As the proposed works lay within a graveyard, the faculty was granted subject to a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief.

Prior to the works a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Ambrey Archaeology and approved by Victoria Bryant, Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Worcester and Aidan Smyth Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Malvern Hills District Council.

Initial excavations in the location of the proposed soakaway were carried out in March 2023 to assess the levels of percolation. Human bones were encountered and the percolation pit was moved to avoid them. Subsequent excavations carried out in July 2023 comprised the hand excavation of a pit to contain the soakaway and a service run to contain a storm drain.

This comprised a pit 1.7m square and 1.8m deep. Here the remains of five graves were recorded partially extending into the pit. The remains were recorded *in situ* lifted and stored during the works. With the agreement of the archaeological curators and the incumbent of the church, the remains were then reinterred as closely as possible to their original locations when the pit was backfilled.

Of the five skeletons, two are thought to have been children, two adults or sub-adults and one, being only a fragmented skull was difficult to determine. Three of the burials were at a depth of 0.8m, the skull at a depth of 1.05m, the deepest being a coffined individual buried at a depth of 1.5m. From the form of the coffin including a handle, it is thought that this grave is Victorian or later.

One sherd of pottery from a grave fill is dated as medieval but there was no other direct evidence to provide dates for the remainder of the graves. Where grave cuts were discernible, they were tight to the skeletons, indicating that the uncoffined remains had probably been buried in shrouds.

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## 1. Background

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out by Ambrey Archaeology of groundworks at St Peter's Church Bushley, Worcestershire. (NGR SO 87483 34354).

It was carried out on behalf of Andrea Burton of Nick Joyce Architects whose client, the Rural Deanery of Upton upon Severn, were granted permission under a Faculty from the Diocese of Worcester (ref. 2021-064825) for the excavation of an existing gully and drain and installation of drainage soakaway across a grassy pathway in the churchyard to the north of the church.

The faculty was granted subject to conditions as follows:-

1. *An archaeological brief shall be agreed in writing with the Diocesan Advisory Committee before any works commence.*
2. *A copy of the archaeological report shall be submitted to the Diocesan Advisory Committee when works are completed.*
3. *If any human remains are disturbed during the works, they shall be discretely and reverently buried at the direction of the incumbent of the church as soon as reasonably practicable.*

Prior to the works a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Ambrey Archaeology (AA 2023 and approved by Victoria Bryant, Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Worcester and Aidan Smyth Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Malvern Hills District Council and formed part of the approved documents on a subsequent planning application to Malvern Hills District Council (PI ref M/23/00406/FUL). The application was approved in July 2023. Condition 4 of the approval states that:

*Within 12 months of the consent hereby granted, the archaeological post investigation assessment shall be completed in accordance with the programme set out within the previously agreed Ambrey Archaeology Written Scheme of Investigation dated 7 March 2023 approved by the Wychavon Archaeology and Planning Advisor for event number WSM78630, and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of the results and archive deposition secured.*

*Reason: In accordance with the requirements of paragraphs 194 and 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (as amended) and SWDP 6 & 24 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 (dated 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023).*

## 2. Aims

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines the objective of a **watching brief** as to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on a site;

"The purpose of a watching brief is:-

- a. *to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.*
- b. *to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not*

sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard "(Standard and guidance for archaeological watching brief, ClfA 2014).

### 3. Site location and topography

St Peter's Church (Fig 1) is located in the north of the village of Bushley in the valley of the River Severn on the opposite side of the river to the town of Tewkesbury about 2.4km to the south-east. The church is located in a sub-oval churchyard enclosed by a stone wall, to the west of the road which runs roughly north-west by south-east through the village. A trackway encloses the walled churchyard, and the former Rectory stands immediately to the north-west.

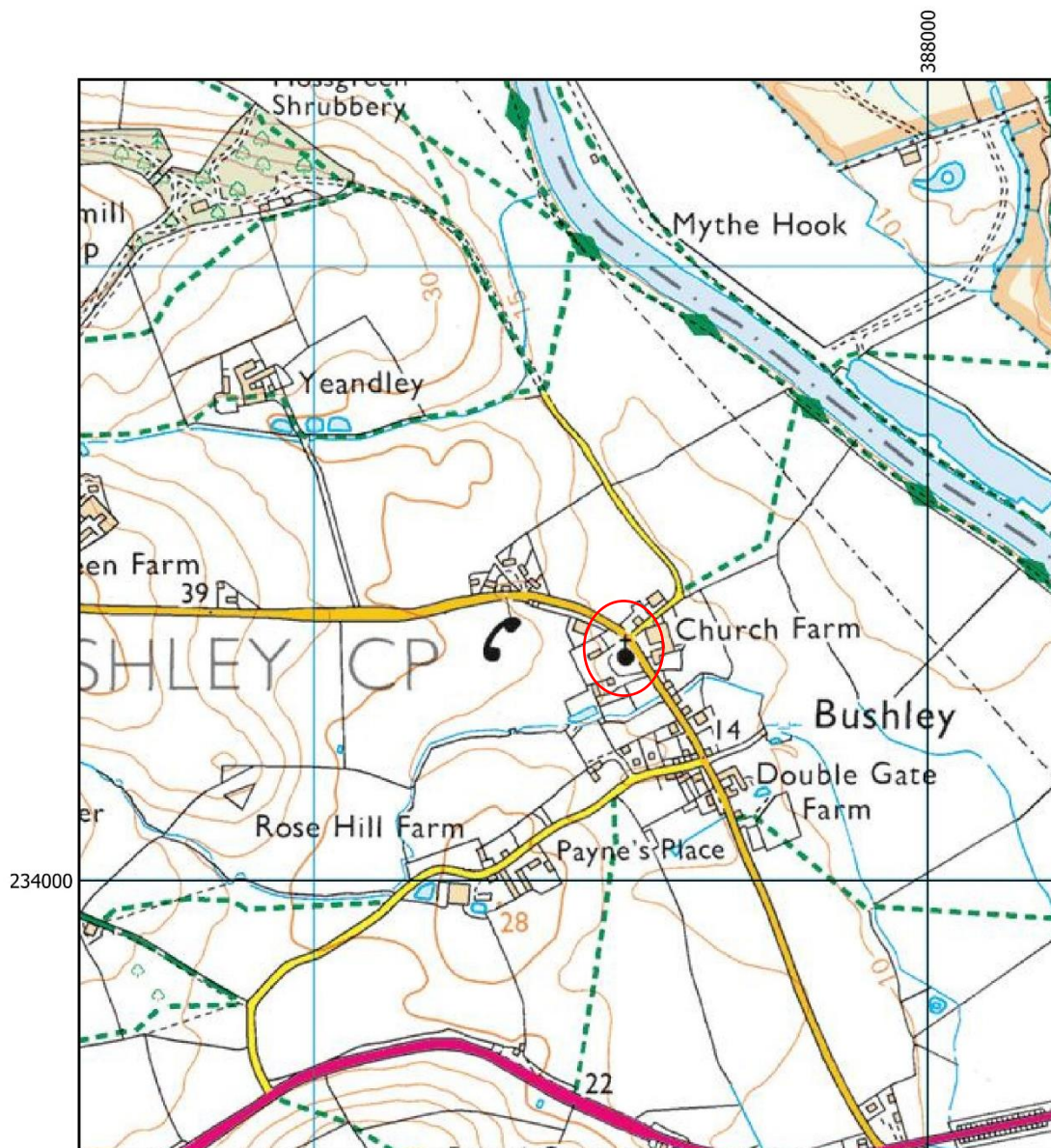


Figure 1: Site location (OS Explorer, 1:25, 000)

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## 4. Archaeological context

According to the Victoria County History entry for the parish (Page & Willis-Bund 1924), 'Bushly' was included in the hundred of Oswaldslow and held in the Bishop of Worcester's manor of Bredon at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was sold to Brictric, Lord of Hanleyson of Algar by Bishop Lyfing (1038–44). There are two accounts of Bushley in the Domesday Survey of 1086. One says that Brictric bought it, together with a house in Worcester city and a wood a league in length and the same in breadth, for 3 marks of gold and the other account says that Brictric paid rent to the bishop for it every year, 'and yet he rendered to the bishop whatever he owed to the King's service.'

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century the estate descended with the manor of Hanley Castle as part of the honour of Tewkesbury. In 1545 Henry VIII granted it to Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, and his successors held Bushley until 1647, when it was sold by the Parliamentary Trustees to William Hancocke.

It is thought that the first church in this location was founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the Lord of the (Bushley) Manor, Simon de Columba, a member of a Norman family that arrived with William the Conqueror in 1066 (Nicoll, undated). This was replaced by a church built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Lord Edward le Despencer, Earl of Gloucester. This church had a nave, chancel and a low tower framed by four large oak baulks erected on stout plinths. The walls were of rubble, coated with rough-cast and had 'decorated' tracery in its windows. It was recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the old church on the site had effigies of Edward le Despencer and his wife Elizabeth, who died in 1375 and 1409 respectively (ibid).

The church, with two cottages, was pulled down in 1842 although two windows of 14<sup>th</sup> century date from the old church were built into an artificial ruin at nearby Pull Court.

The replacement and extant St Peter's Church (WSM06981, List Entry 1349706) was rebuilt in 1843 by Edward Blore with a chancel added in 1856 by GG Scott. It was built for Dr E C Dowdeswell of Pull Court, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century country house 2.2km NNW of Bushley, now a school.

The consecration of the new church took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1843 in the presence of the Bishop of Worcester, who was Dr. Dowdeswell's nephew (Nicoll, undated). The total building cost of the church was almost £5,000 and it was further endowed by Dr. Dowdeswell in the sum of £10,000. The churchyard was also walled and levelled at this time.

The Church is of Blue Lias squared coursed rubble with Bath stone dressings. The 1843 section is Perpendicular in style with nave, transepts and west tower with a broach spire. The chancel is in Decorated style, elaborate with steep slate roof, crocketed pinnacles and pierced parapets (Page & Willis-Bund 1924). Within the church are a number of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century memorials which must have been re-set in 1843. The church also holds a font which may date to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was used in the 1840s as a drinking trough for cattle on a nearby farm and then kept for many years in the churchyard on a plinth said to come from the earlier church.



*Figure 2. Location of listed buildings in the vicinity of the church*

There are several listed buildings in the vicinity of the church (Fig. 2) including the churchyard wall (List entry 1178841) dating to c. 1843 which is described as of Blue Lias stone with limestone coping extending all around churchyard. This is listed for group value with the church, as is Wellingtonia House, 50m to the west - the former rectory (List Entry Number: 1082216), a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century red brick house with stone dressings and plain tile roof with ornamental cresting.

The Old School, 60m NNE of the church (List entry 1082215), is a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century building incorporating part of a 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century house which was built for Pull Court estate. It is of timber-frame and plaster with plain tiled roofs.

Church Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building, 45m east of the church (List entry 1082214), is described as a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century house enclosing a 17<sup>th</sup> century cottage to the rear of red brick with plain tile roofs.

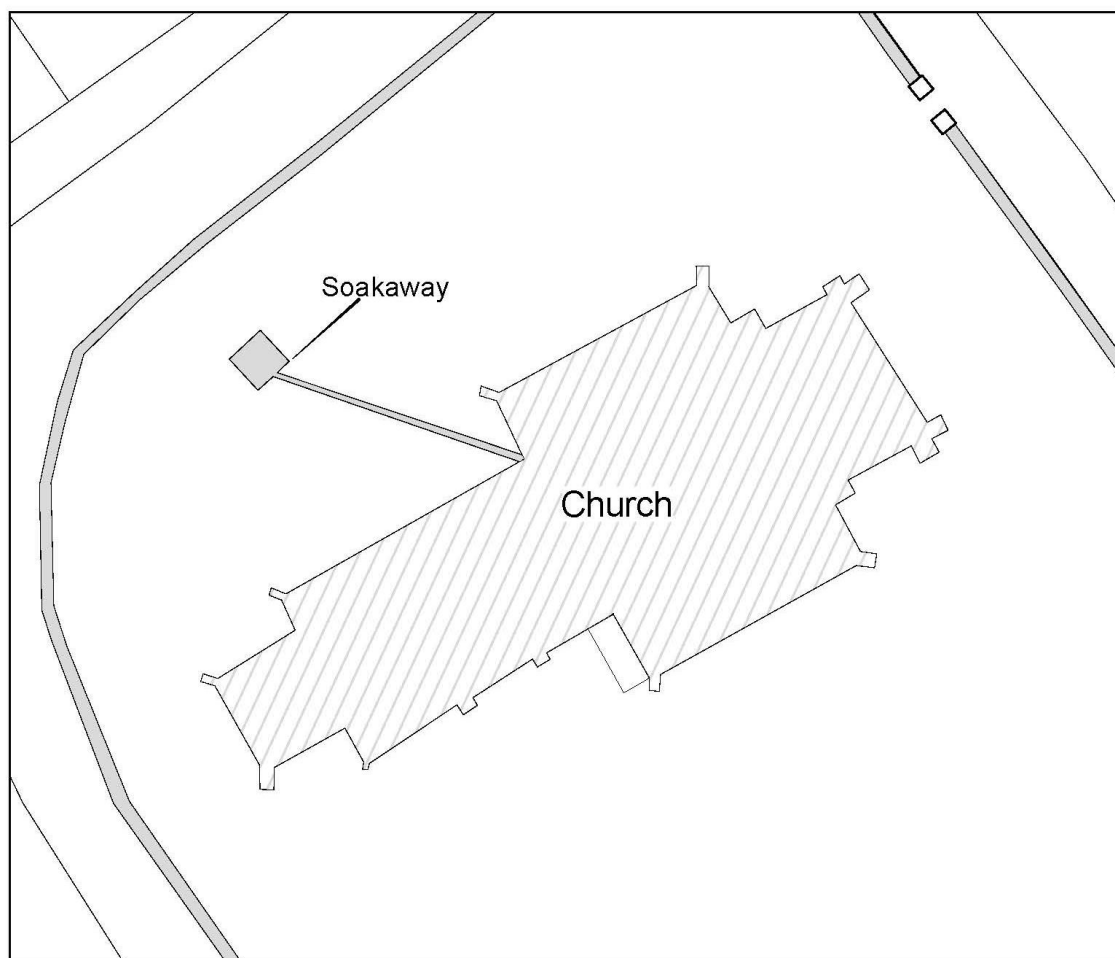
Bedrock at the site is mudstone of the Salford Shale member with interbedded mudstone and limestone of the Wilmcote limestone member as well as mudstone of the Penarth group. Superficial Head deposits and deposits of Holt Heath sand and gravel are also mapped (BGS 2023).

## 5. Methods

### 5.1 Fieldwork

The watching brief was carried out in two stages. Initially a narrow pit to assess percolation in location of the proposed soakaway was excavated in March 2023 under archaeological supervision by Elizabeth Connolly MA, ACIfA (Plates 1 and 2). Human bone was encountered at a depth of 0.8m and the pit was moved slightly to the north. Following positive testing of percolation, the drain and soakaway were excavated in July 2023 (Plates 2-14) and monitored by Tom Rogers MSc, MCIfA.

The excavation, comprising a square pit 1.7m x 1.7m and 1.8m deep, was undertaken by hand and under archaeological supervision. A trench 0.3m wide and 0.4m deep was also excavated between the soakaway and the church for the installation of a storm drain.



*Figure 3: Location of soakaway and drainage, based on Drawing no 2222-05 provided by Nick Joyce Architects*

During the course of the excavation of the soakaway, five graves were partially uncovered. Following liaison with the Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese of Worcester and Archaeology and Planning Advisor to Malvern Hills District Council it was agreed that the remains would be removed from the area directly impacted by the soakaway and reinterred as close as possible to the remainder of the burial when the soakaway was installed.

The exposed parts of the burials were recorded *in situ* before being carefully lifted and stored in a discrete location within the church during the works. Following the installation of the structure of the soakaway, the remains were photographed and following further liaison with Reverend Moss, the incumbent of the church, the remains were reinterred prior to and during the reinstatement of material around the structure of the soakaway. A waterproof label within a plastic bag, referencing both the archaeological event and the specific context was placed with the remains, which themselves were not bagged in order to replicate, as closely as possible, the conditions under which the remainder of the burials were subject.

Context recording was undertaken using context sheets and other pro-forma recording sheets and photographs were taken with a Nikon D3200 SLR camera. Plans and sections of trenches and features were drawn on permatrace at 1:10 and 1:50 scales.

## 5.2 Post excavation works

Following excavation, all context sheets were checked and cross referenced. Provision will be made to upload the digital archive of the project via OASIS (project id.: ambreyar2-518833).

A single sherd of pottery recovered from a grave fill was examined by Robert Hedge, the results of which are presented in Section 6.2 below.

# 6. Results

## 6.1 Stratigraphic

Topsoil (101) comprised a loose, dark brown sandy silt with occasional angular stones to a depth of 0.2m. Beneath this, a compact, mid-brown silty clay with occasional cobbles, present to a depth of 0.6m, was interpreted as a mixed subsoil layer (102). This overlay (103), a compact, mid reddish-brown clay containing angular stones and cobbles to a depth of 1.8m. This is interpreted as a layer derived from the natural mudstone substrate and heavily disturbed by repeated burials. This was the context into which the recorded graves were cut.

The uppermost burial recorded was SK106, an east-west orientated child inhumation, the torso of which was exposed in the soakaway extending from the eastern baulk at a depth of 0.7m (Plates 4 and 5). The skull was crushed but appeared to have been on one side, facing north. Initially the skull, scapulae, clavicles, upper vertebrae and ribs were exposed, although later in the excavation when the sides of the soakaway were straightened the radii and ulnae were also exposed, indicating that the arms had been folded across the abdomen. The distance from the elbows to the top of the cranium was 0.37m, which would suggest that the child was 4-5 years in age.

The skeleton lay in cut [107] which was approximately 0.38m wide, no more than 5cm wider than the skeleton itself. The grave fill (108) was a firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks.

To the west of this grave, on an approximately similar line, inhumation (104) comprised the legs and feet of an adult or sub adult extending from the western baulk of the soakaway (Plates 6 and 7). The lowest part of the pelvis, both legs and feet were present, although the tibia and fibula of the left leg had been disturbed and the patella was missing. The length of the femur (greater trochanter to lateral condyle) was 38cm which, using the formula set out by King and Grafton (undated), would give a height of 153.8cm (5 feet) for a male or 145.3cm (4'9" inches) for a female.

The fill of the grave [109] comprised a firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks. A single sherd of pottery was recovered which is described below. This fill was very similar to the surrounding material and as a result the grave cut [105] was barely discernible although it is thought to have been approximately 0.4m wide.

Slightly to the south of this and at the same depth, SK113 comprised one femur, two fibulae and a partial pelvis exposed at the south-western corner of the soakaway (Plates 8 and 9). The femur was 25cm long, suggesting that this was a child less than a metre in height. No cut or fill associated with this burial could be discerned.

Slightly to the north of SK106 but at a depth of 1.05m, SK110 comprised a skull at the eastern edge of the soakaway; the remainder of the inhumation presumably extending to the east (Plates 10 and 11). The cranium, mandible and some cervical vertebrae were present and fragmented. A stone had been placed to one side of the skull possibly to prop it facing upwards. Only the south-western corner of the grave cut [112] was recorded, the other side having been removed before the burial was recognised. It was filled by (111) a firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks.

The deepest grave within the soakaway was a coffined inhumation (SK114) which was partially exposed from the northern edge of the soakaway. The coffin was fragmented although individual sections including part of the lid were well-preserved and was covered in some form of metal plating. A coffin handle was also present. The exposed part of the inhumation comprised the right leg and foot which were well preserved (Plates 12 and 13). The femur was 45cm long which, using the formula cited above, would give a height of 169.4cm (5' 6") for a man or 160cm (5' 2") for a woman. The grave cut [116] was filled by (115), a soft red silty clay.

No human remains or other archaeological features were recorded in the trench excavated for the storm drain between the soakaway and church which did not exceed the depth of (102) (Plate 14).

## 6.2 Pottery (by Robert Hedge)

A single sherd of pottery was recovered from deposit (109). It comprised approximately 7% of the rim of a wheel-finished, unglazed jar with an everted, infolded rim. The diameter of the complete vessel would have been 280-290mm. The vessel had a reduced grey core and brown surfaces. The fabric was somewhat unusual: alongside frequent (<1mm) quartz inclusions, it also contained rare organic, chert and sandstone inclusions typical of Worcester-type products; however, the presence of occasional moderate (<2mm) fragments of Malvernian rock suggests that it belongs to the group of wares produced between the Malvern Hills and the River Severn collectively ascribed to fabric 56 (WAAS 2017).

The rim form is most typical of vessels of 13<sup>th</sup> century date, although similar forms persisted into the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A date range of 1200 - 1350 CE is therefore likely.

Malvernian wares are abundant within medieval deposits around Tewkesbury (e.g. Steane and Vince 2006), reflecting the proximity of the potteries and the ease of river transport. This sherd is typical of domestic material incorporated into the soils within medieval settlements through informal waste disposal practices and/or agricultural processes such as manuring.

## 7. Discussion

The watching brief demonstrated that, although the position of the soakaway had initially been selected as a pathway through the churchyard in which no gravestones or other markers were present, there are burials in this area. Although osteological analysis of the remains was not within the scope of the project, it is clear that two of the individuals were children and two were adults or sub adults.

The graves are, as would be expected in a Christian churchyard, orientated east-west with the head to the west. Although at different depths it appears that two rows of burials were partially uncovered, 113, 104 and 114 forming one to the west and 106 and 110 another to the east. Such an arrangement implies a well-ordered graveyard in which graves were, in this location, well-marked and new graves placed so as not to disturb earlier burials. Although many of the bones had been fragmented by the weight of overlying material, preservation was generally good and there was no sign that the graves had been disturbed by later burials. Only a small number of disarticulated human bones were recovered from the surrounding material (104).

Following the 1857 Burial Act, it became illegal to disturb graves without a licence, which might imply that the burials here postdate this act, but the pattern may equally reflect well a well organised system of churchyard management.

A single sherd of pottery representing part of the rim of a medieval jar produced in the Malvern area was recovered from grave fill (109). This was dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries which provides a *terminus post quem* date for the grave, although it is possible that the sherd was residual in this context. The coffined burial with ornate handle and some form of metal plating on the outside of the coffin implies a Victorian or later date.

Other than this, there is no direct evidence for dating the burials. Although the current church was built in 1843, the burials may well have been laid down when the previous church was standing. Three of the burials were at a depth of 0.7 - 0.8m depth, the single skull 110 at 1.05m, while the coffined burial 114 was 1.55m depth (5'1"). The depth of the burial, however, does not provide direct dating evidence, as no act of Parliament specified depths of burial. It is further recorded that the graveyard was walled and levelled in 1843 when the present church was built so that the current ground surface may not reflect the level from which the graves were dug.

It is probable that the uncoffined burials were laid in shrouds, if at an early date of woollen cloth following the burying in Woollen Acts of 1666-80, although these were largely ignored by 1760 and repealed by 1814 (Dolan 2015). This is further evidenced by the narrow grave cuts, where visible, which imply a shrouded burial (Hadley 2001). The distinction between the coffined and uncoffined burials may reflect their date or differing social status.

## 8. Acknowledgements

Ambrey Archaeology would like to thank the following for their assistance in completing this project; Andrea Burton of Nick Joyce Architects for commissioning the project, Steve Bibby, Sean and Lee for assistance during the hand excavation, Victoria Bryant the Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese and Aidan Smyth of MDC for monitoring the project.

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## Figures

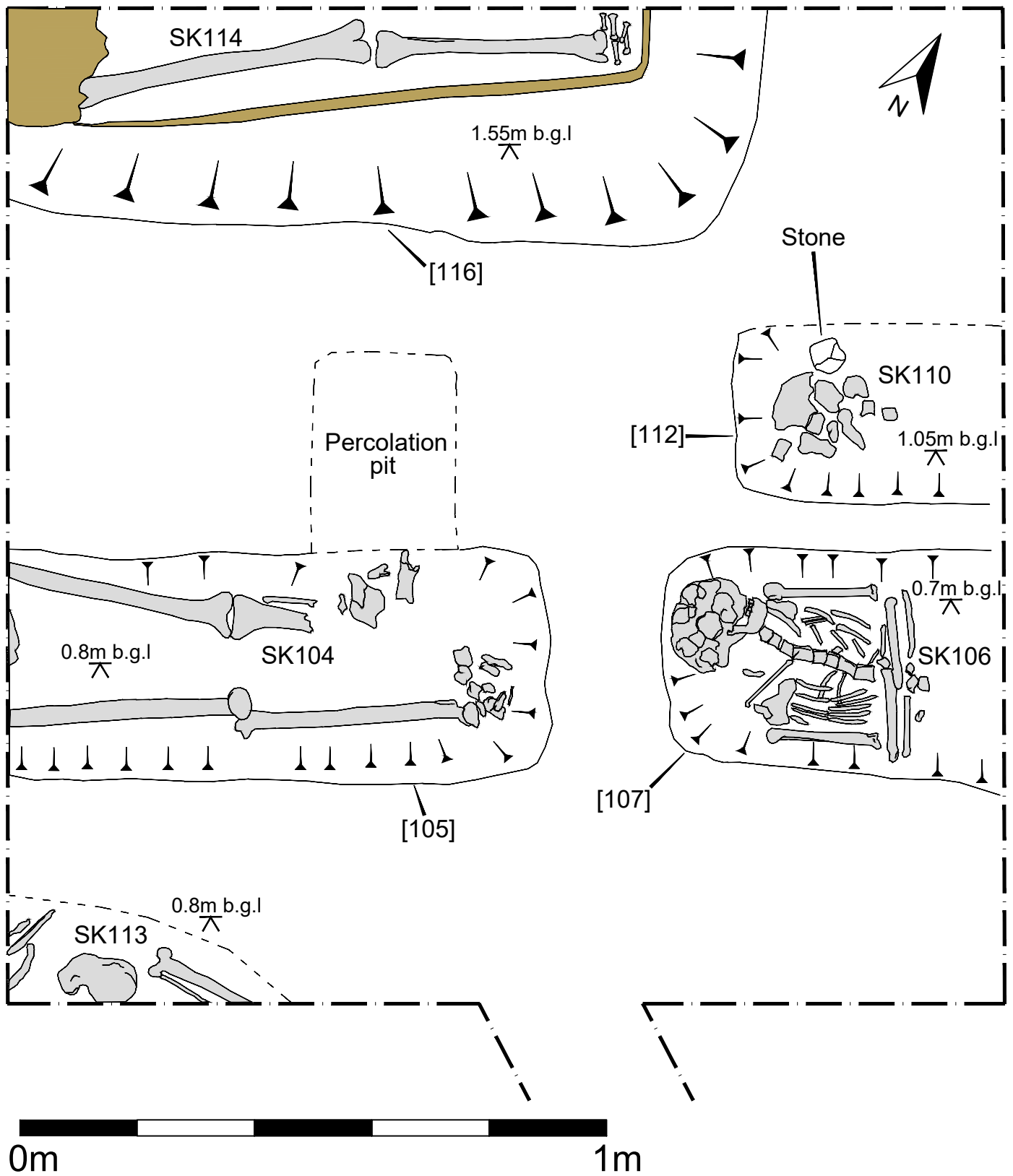


Figure 4. Plan of graves recorded within soakaway

## Plates



*Plate 1. Initial excavation of percolation pit in March 2023, view east, scales 1m*



*Plate 2. Percolation pit showing human remains appearing (later identified as skeleton 104, view south, scales 0.4m and 0.3m*



*Plate 3. Area of the soakaway prior to excavation, view north-west*



*Plate 4. Skeleton 106, , top of photo to west, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 5. Skeleton 106 laid out prior to reburial*



*Plate 6. Skeleton 104 (left) adjacent to Skeleton 106 (right), top of photo to north, scale 1m*



*Plate 7. Skeleton 104 laid out prior to reburial, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 8. Skeleton 113  
View south, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 9. Skeleton 113 laid out prior to reburial, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 10. Skull 110, east to top of photo, scale 0.2m*



*Plate 11. Skull 110, laid out prior to reburial, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 12. Skeleton 114. section of coffin lid to left, north to top of photo, scale 0.5m*



*Plate 13. Skeleton 114, laid out prior to reburial*

*Plate 14. Service run between soak-away and church, view south-east, scales 0.5m and 1m*



## Appendix 1 Context descriptions

**Soakaway:** Length: 1.7m; Width: 1.7m; Maximum depth: 1.8m

Context	Depth	Description	Interpretation
101	0.00-0.2m	Loose dark brown sandy silt with occasional angular stones	Topsoil
102	0.2 – 0.6m	Compact mid-brown silty clay with occasional cobbles	Subsoil
103	0.6-0.97m	Compact mid reddish-brown clay containing angular stones and cobbles	Mixed redeposited clay
104	0.8m	East-west orientated adult inhumation – legs and feet exposed within area of soakaway. Left leg damaged and patella missing.	Human burial
105	0.8-0.9m	Shallow oval cut into (103) – barely discernible but thought to be 0.4m wide.	Cut of burial 103
106	0.7-0.8m	East west orientated child inhumation exposed – torso, arms and head exposed within area of soakaway. Skull and ribs fragmented by weight of overlying material	Human burial
107	0.8-0.9m	Shallow oval cut into (103), approximately 0.38m wide.	Cut for burial 106
108	0.8-0.9m	Firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks	Fill of grave cut [107]
109	0.8-0.9m	Firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks	Fill of grave cut [105]
110	1.05m	Skull exposed in eastern edge of soakaway – cranium and mandible very fragmented.	Human burial
111	1.05m	Firm, mid brown sandy clay with occasional charcoal flecks	Fill of grave cut [112]
112	1.05-1.15m	Cut around grave 110 – on corner visible implying sub rectangular cut	Grave cut
113	0.8m – 0.9m	Partial child skeleton – one femur, two fibulae and a partial pelvis exposed within soakaway – no cut or fill for burial discernible	Human burial
114	1.55-1.7m	East-west orientated coffined burial of adult- right leg and foot exposed in soakaway. Coffin degraded but solid - one coffin handle recovered.	Human burial
115	1.55-1.7m	Soft red silty clay	Fill of grave cut 116
116	1.55-1.7m	Sub oval cut exposed in soakaway to a maximum width of 0.4m	Grave cut