

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

FORMER CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL
FORBURY CHASE
SHERFORD STREET
BROMYARD
HEREFORDSHIRE
HR7 4DL

NGR: SO 365642 254610

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PROJECT TITLE: FORMER CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL BROMYARD



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1. Non-Technical Summary

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological excavation carried out by Border Archaeology at the former Congregational Chapel of Forbury Chase, in Sherford Street Bromyard (hereafter called 'the site') the chapel, manse and grounds for residential housing.

The aim was to identify and record any surviving archaeological finds, features or deposits revealed during the course of the groundworks phase of the development and to confirm that no impact on the archaeological resource occurred without the implementation of this programme of archaeological work.

The programme of archaeological fieldwork undertaken at the site revealed evidence of scaffolding pits associated with the building of the Congregational Chapel; 21 articulated human burials from both within the chapel and outside in the burial ground; and a pit which pre-dates the building of the chapel. Natural was observed in this area at c. 111.94 m OD.



2. Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Jim Bennett Esq. of Preservation Citation House to undertake a programme of archaeological excavation and observation within the former Congregational Chapel Sherford Street Bromyard Herefordshire during the course of groundworks relating to the development of the chapel, manse and grounds for residential housing.

The site (*Fig 1*) is bounded to the north by housing, to the east and south by fields and to the west by Sherford Street. The grid reference for the centre of the site is NGR SO 365642 254610.

The ground level to the north of the site at the intersection of Rowberry Street and Church Street is 121m OD, sloping down to 104m OD to the south of the site at the base of Sherford St. The site code is CCB10.

Documentary sources refer to the site as both a church and a chapel; however, for the sake of clarity, this report uses the chapel designation.



Fig 1: Plan showing site location

2.1 Soils & geology

The topography of the site and its environs is characterised by valley slopes associated with the River Frome; minor natural or artificial watercourses draining to the east are recorded but have not been fully located (Williams 1987, 53). The soils are argillic or stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the Bromyard association (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ragg *et al.* 1984) overlying rocks of the Devonian St Maughan's Formation (British Geological Survey 1:250,000, sheet 52°N-0.4°W).



3. Historical & Archaeological Background

The settlement is first recorded c.840, when there was a Minster church, the date of whose foundation is unknown; however, it is possible it dates to the 8th century (Williams 1987, 9-10; Dalwood 2005, 2). The Domesday entry records the manor, known then as 'Bromgerbe', as having two priests and a mill, held by the bishop of Hereford (Thorn & Thorn 1983, 182c).

Although there is no charter, it is probable that the borough was founded by Bishop Richard de Capella between 1121 and 1127 (Williams 1987, 11). Burgesses are first recorded in *The Red Book*, a survey of the lands held by the bishop c. 1285, when the town had a value of £23 1s 6½d. The survey records 255 named tenants listed street-by-street (Dalwood 2005, 2; Williams 1987, 43-5). Bromyard was represented in parliament in the medieval period (Merewether and Stephens 1835, 2278). Documentary records are detailed for the 15th and 16th centuries and a further detailed survey was carried out in 1575 (Williams 1987, 50-2).

It is evident from various sources that Bromyard had been a small market town since the Middle Ages and its status remained largely unchanged throughout the post-medieval period. The town was described by Silas Taylor c.1652 as "a market town situate very pleasantly betwixt hills the inhabitants wherof boast themselves to be the inhabitants of the most ancient market towns on this side of England" (Taylor quoted in Williams 1987, 41). In 1858, the town was described as having a population of 3,093 and acreage of 8611 and consisted of: "...several irregular streets; the districts around abounding with orchards, and the surrounding country diversified by hill and dale" (Kelly's Directory of Herefordshire, 1858).

Bromyard and the surrounding area have long been associated with Nonconformity, although it is difficult to establish when its congregation was formed. Mary Hopkins, widow of the Rev. Lewis Hopkins (pastor at Bromyard from 1767-89), is quoted as stating that the congregation had existed since the 'Great Ejection', which followed the Act of Uniformity of 1662, and was an amalgamation of dissenters from the parishes of Docklow, Shelsley and Stamford-upon-Team, whose ministers had been 'ejected' for refusing to conform to the *Book of Common Prayer* (Stevens 1930, 16-7). It is, however, impossible at this time to know what year the congregation came to Bromyard, although they were definitely worshipping there by 1672, after the passing of the Royal Act of Indulgence, when a house in Bromyard belonging to one John Bond was licensed as a Presbyterian meeting-place (Stevens 1930, 16; E52/6; Hillaby & Pearson 1980, 88). Presumably, these premises were shut when the act was revoked a few months later, although it seems likely that the congregation continued to worship secretly until the Toleration Act of 1689, as in 1690 the congregation had a recognised minister, Samuel Philipps, and a congregation of 40 (Stevens 1930, 21-2).

The Congregational Chapel, situated on Sherford Street, was built in 1701-2 using subscriptions from the communicants. That they raised the money so soon after the Toleration Act of 1689 further supports the hypothesis that the nonconformist congregation within Bromyard had continued to practise between 1672 and 1689. It has been suggested that the current chapel is situated on the same plot as the 1672 meeting-place (Stevens 1930, 16; E52/6; Hillaby & Pearson 1980, 88). The building is square and constructed from local sandstone with a hipped roof and porch, located on the west-facing external elevation, with Tuscan columns and a metope frieze (Pevsner 1963, 92). Many of these external features date to the 19th century and may be part of a renovation carried out c.1844.



The chapel is stepped back from the road and the land to the front and right hand side comprise the burial ground. Attached to the east-facing external elevation is a red-brick annexe built in 1868 as a vestry and schoolhouse. Behind the chapel is a manse for the use of the ministers of the chapel. This building is at least contemporary with the chapel, although it may have earlier origins, and the south elevation may have been re-modelled in the 19th century (E52/6).



4. Methodology

4.1 Summary Description of Works

This programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with practices set out by the Institute for Archaeologists in *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation* (2008) and *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (2008). Border Archaeology adheres to the IfA *Code of conduct* (2010) and the revised *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology* (2008) and to Herefordshire Archaeology's *Standards for Archaeological Projects in Herefordshire* (Herefordshire Council 2004).

All groundworks within the study areas (*Fig 4 & 4*) were subject to archaeological observation, the aim being to identify, record, and, where appropriate, further investigate any surviving deposits, features or structures of archaeological significance.

The groundworks entailed excavation of the interior of the former Congregational Chapel and services trench within the burial ground, and a watching brief to the rear of the chapel within the grounds of the manse. The site was excavated manually by Border Archaeology staff and where appropriate a machine using a toothless bucket and monitored by a member of staff from Border Archaeology was used to remove topsoil and modern disturbance. All spoil and removed material was examined for artefacts and human remains.

Full written, graphic and photographic records were made in accordance with Border Archaeology's Field Recording Manual. Levels were calculated by placing Temporary Bench Marks (TBM) taken from building plans provided by Speller Metcalfe.

Plans and sections were produced on gridded, archivally stable polyester film at scales of 1:50, 1:20 or 1:10, as appropriate. All site drawings are numbered and listed in a drawing register, these numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.

A photographic record was compiled using a high-resolution 12 MPX digital camera. Each photograph, other than general shots of work in progress, contains an appropriate scale and records are indexed and cross-referenced to the written record. Details concerning subject and direction of view are maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number. The progress of the evaluation was recorded & assessed by the Company's General Manager George Children MA MIfA using the Company's ISO 9001 procedures.

The site has produced 133 context records, 1 section drawing at 1:20, 12 multi context plans at 1:20, 9 multi context plans at 1:50, and 158 photographs. In addition the site has produced 1 small box of finds. The human remains were reburied with their associated coffin furniture in the Bromyard Cemetery Bromyard Herefordshire.

The site records can be found under the site code CCB10, and will be deposited with the *Bromyard & District Local History Society 5 Sherford Street Bromyard Herefordshire HR7 4DL*.

4.2 Recovery, processing and curation of artefactual data



All associated artefacts recovered were retained, cleaned, labelled and stored according to Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (IfA 2008) and First Aid for Finds (Watkinson & Neal 2001).

All artefacts were bagged and labelled with the site code and context number before being removed off-site and assemblages have been examined by an approved specialist according to typological or chronological criteria and conservation needs identified. The ceramic evidence has been identified and assessed in relation to existing national and regional research frameworks for Roman, Saxon and medieval pottery.

Conservation, if required, will be undertaken by an approved conservator on advice provided by a suitable specialist and in accordance with United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (now part of ICON, the Institute of Conservation) guidelines.

Environmental Strategy

No deposits considered suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the course of the fieldwork.

5. Results

5.1 Features predating construction of the chapel

A deep irregular oval pit [141] appears to be the only feature associated with this early phase of activity (*Plate 1*). The pit (111.12m OD) was 1.18m deep and revealed sharp sides and a flat base (110.64m OD). Three distinct fills were identified, the earliest of which (140) contained early post-medieval pottery, with a piece of probable Herefordshire glazed fine micaceous ware (A7b) being recovered from the middle fill (139), suggesting the feature may well predate the chapel and could potentially be a rubbish pit associated with an earlier structure, possibly even the original meeting house of 1672 owned by John Bond. This identification can be corroborated with reference to the orientation of the pit, which does not conform to or respect the layout of the subsequent chapel building of 1701.



Plate 1: View of possible rubbish pit [141]

5.2 Structural features

5.2.1 Scaffold pits

The interior of the chapel contained 20 rectangular pits [104 116 143–173 183 & 223] (*Plate 2*), which appear to have been dug to support scaffolding during construction of the chapel in 1701-2. The pits averaged 0.5m × 0.5m × 0.4m and were arranged in five rows cut into the natural soil (184) and bedrock (103) below (*Fig 4*). Traditional masons' scaffolds comprise upright standards, cross-braces or ledgers and putlogs, connected with rope. The standards were usually spaced approximately 2m apart and set about 0.6m into the ground, close the walls. The portions of scaffold were bound with cross-braces which enabled the



structure to support a greater weight. These pits did not follow the regular pattern of spacing prescribed by tradition (*Fig 4*); this could be because the same scaffolding was used to erect the roof or it could simply be the result of personal preference.



Plate 2: A possible 'scaffold pit'

5.2.2 Wall

Wall [236] was revealed beneath the floor of the redbrick schoolhouse extension on the east side of the chapel and has been interpreted as the exterior wall of the original schoolroom and vestry building, built 1701-2, which was demolished in 1868 and replaced with the redbrick schoolroom standing today (*Plate 3*) (Stevens 1930, 4).



Plate 3: View E showing wall [236]



5.3 The burials

Each of the graves revealed within the interior of the chapel had been cut into (102), which appears to have been deposited following construction, presumably to provide a bedding layer for the chapel floor. The graves averaged at about 1m deep, each having encountered bedrock (103) at this level. All were orientated east-west, except for [118], which was aligned N-S in front of the pulpit (**Fig 4**). Each of the graves contained a single inhumation, with the exception of [124]/[230], which appeared to be a family of three adults, thought to be Revd Joel Banfield and his two wives.

The graves in the burial ground (**Fig 5**) were laid out in rows, with some intercutting and truncation of earlier inhumations, a common occurrence in burial grounds in use over a long period. The lack of dating evidence and breastplate information from this area of the excavation meant burial dates could not be established with any precision, although brick type can be used as a rough guide, indicating that tombs [188] and [195] are of late 19th – early 20th century date. The truncation of some of the grave cuts suggests sufficient time had elapsed between successive interments to remove all trace of their location at ground level. The shallowest burial, tomb [188], was located at 111.38m OD, 0.71m from ground level, and the deepest, [223], was recovered at 110.10m OD, 1.88m from ground level, which is equivalent to 6 feet 2 inches. Grave [223] was unusual in that it had been dug into the bedrock by 0.50m, suggesting that, for whatever reason, particular care and effort had been made to make sure this particular grave was the traditional 6 feet deep.

The empty grave

Grave cut [177] (**Fig 4**) was filled by a loose mid brown silty-sand (176) and ended at 0.98m deep when it hit the bedrock (103). Unusually [177] contained no evidence of ether human remains or coffin furniture, raising a question as to whether anyone was

ever buried in the grave.

There are several explanations for the presence of an unused grave: it is possible that the grave was not used and the body was buried some where else, or was possibly moved to another location, such as a family crypt, after burial; a body could have been buried in only a shroud, and the lime within the bedrock have destroyed all the skeletal remains; or the body could have been stolen prior to burial. Although this last suggestion may seem far fetched, body snatching was common in the 18th – 19th centuries, during which time anatomists and doctors would look to the black market to provide them with corpses for dissection and study.

The human bone

Twenty-one articulated human burials were recovered from the excavations. Contexts (111); (115); (123); (127); (129); (133); (137); (197); (216); (227) and (228) inside the chapel, and contexts (186); (193); (203); (204); (207); (208); (213); (219); (221) and (225) outside. Contexts (186) and (193) were located in a brick lined tomb with a sandstone slab roof (**Fig 5**).

Due to the nature of the project only a minimal assessment was carried out, including estimations of age and sex when the appropriate elements were present. Subadult age was estimated following observations of eruption of the permanent molars



(Gustafson and Knoch, 1974) and epiphyseal fusion (Scheuer and Black, 2000). No attempt was made to more precisely age adult individuals. Adult sex was estimated through observations of cranial and pelvic morphology following (Buikstra and Ubelaker, 1994). The human remains were retained for assessment and were subsequently reburied as individuals in the Bromyard Cemetery.

Preservation of the assemblage was mixed, but on average those buried outside had a better state of bone preservation than those inside the chapel. This has been attributed to the presence of seams of lime within the bedrock beneath the chapel which may have degraded the bone. The chapel is built on an outcrop of bedrock which sloped down to the south, resulting in all the graves within the chapel being cut into the bedrock, whereas many of those outside in the burial ground were buried in soil, aiding their preservation.

There were a higher number of adult burials 76% (16/21) than subadults 24% (5/21). Nine percent (2/21) of the total assemblage were under the age of seven years old at death. The majority of subadults 14% (3/21) were between 7 and 16, neonate burials comprised of five percent (1/21) of the subadult population as did those aged 1 month to 6 years (5%, 1/21) (**Fig 2**).

The assemblage showed a slightly higher proportion of adult females to males, with 37% being female or possibly female, in comparison to 29% male or possibly male, and for two of the individuals (10%) the cranial and pelvic bones were not present, or were too fragmented to allow estimates of sex (**Fig 3**).

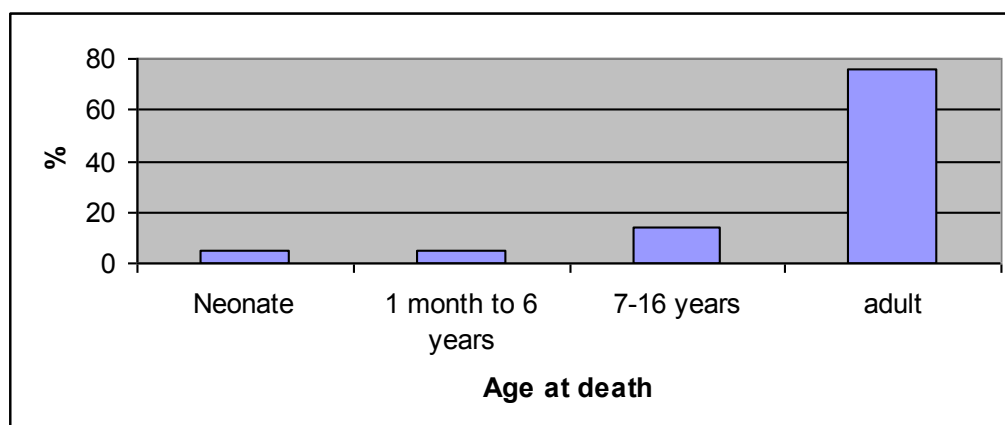


Fig 2: Age at death

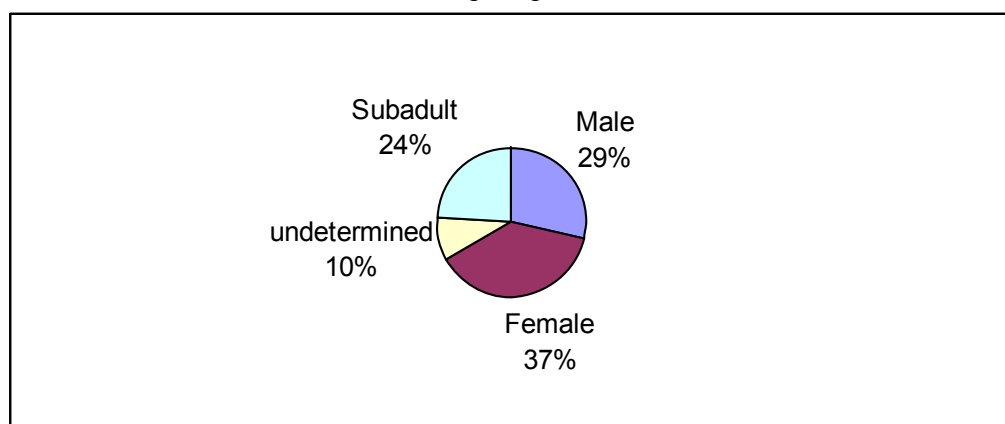


Fig 3: Demographic distribution



During the assessment it was noted that female (197) had two fused thoracic vertebrae, and evidence of DISH in the spine (Plate 5). Male (186) had evidence of the joint disorder osteoarthritis on the surface of his femurs, and males (127) and (221) had full ante-mortem tooth loss. Male (115) presented healed trauma to the ribs, the ribs having suffered fractures that had healed but were malaligned, the broken ends having failed to unite properly (Plate 4). No evidence of metabolic diseases, such as rickets or scurvy was observed.



Plate 4: Healed and malaligned ribs from (115)



Plate 5: Fused thoracic vertebrae with evidence of DISH, context (197)

The coffin furniture



Coffin breastplates were usually manufactured from a thin sheet of iron or tin, with decorative stamped patterns visible with a variety of designs, while the name, age and date of death were then etched or painted onto the blank central area. These became common after 1769 when Thomas Pickering, a tin plate manufacturer in Southwark, patented a technique for raising patterns in sheet iron using a power assisted machine, before this date (from c. 1720) coffin furniture had been produced using hand operated die-stamping machines, making them more costly and the

styles limited (Litten, 1991, 106; Miles, 2009, 66). The coffin furniture was retained for assessment and then reburied with the human remains.

The coffin plates from the congregational chapel were very fragile, and were often only represented by a spread of corrosion across the ribs, or did not survive the lifting process. These were therefore examined and photographed in situ. Those that survived lifting were allowed to dry, however little information could be gleaned from them as the inscriptions had been painted on, rather than etched. The use of paint over etching suggests it is likely that there was no one skilled enough at engraving in Bromyard to carry out the work at that time. Comparative material for the congregational chapel assemblage is limited, as, to the authors' knowledge, no typologies for this area of Britain have been compiled, we can, however, make some comparisons with the London typologies.

Although the vast majority of coffin handles, properly known as grips, cannot be precisely dated, there is a typology sequence for London, and even allowing for regional stylistic variations, a number of things can be stated with reasonable certainty: right-angled handles (London Type 3) are the earliest dated form, and have been found in contexts dated 1687-1739 in sites in London (Wroe-Brown, 2001; Cowie, Bekvalac & Kausmally, 2007). Rounded types (London Types 1 and 2) proliferate through the latter part of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century (**Plate 6**), while decorated London Type 5 have only been found in 19th century burials (**Plate 7**) (Miles, A, pers com).

Of the 21 burials, 17 had coffin furniture, the majority of which consisted of London Types 1 and 2 grips (**Plate 6**), with two possible Type 5s from contexts [187] and [194] (**Plate 7**). Five of the contexts had breast plates, those associated with [110] and [217] are both YKW Type 14 (London typology) and have a date range of 1779-1851 (**Plate 8**). The breast plate on [187] is of an unknown type, heavily decorated with angels and the words "The Dead Shall Rise" embossed on the front. It can be loosely dated to the 19th century from the associated coffin handles. Those from [132] and [198] were unidentifiable due to their level of corrosion.



Plate 6: Type 2 group from coffin [110]



Plate 7: Type 5 grip from coffin [187]



Plate 8: Close up of breast plate [110]

The named burials

Heather Benbow

Coffin context: [217]

Coffin plate:

[...] Benbow
Died 25th August
[17]91
Aged 30 Y^{rs}

Although the information left on the breast plate was not complete, we know from the burial register that this was the grave of Heather Benbow, died August 25th 1791, buried on the 27th August 1791, within the chapel (**Fig 4**, grave [179]). Little else is known about Heather Benbow, and not unusually she did not leave a will, more information could potentially be learnt from the congregational chapels' birth and marriage registers.



Plate 9: Heather Benbow (216)

Mary Haywood

Coffin context: [110]

Coffin plate:

Ma[ry] [...]aywood
Died [...] 1817
Aged 7[...] Years

The burial register tells us that Mrs Mary Haywood died on August 1st 1817 and was interred in the Bromyard meeting house on the 8th August (**Fig 4**, grave cut [108]).

As with Heather Benbow, she left no will, and little else is known about her, although again further information could possibly be gained from the registers.



Plate 10: Mrs Mary Haywood (111)

Although the remaining burials either had illegible or no breast plates, it has been possible to extrapolate who they are from the burial register and wall plaques from within the chapel. These are listed below.

Martin Chapman

Martin Chapman, according to the burial register, was the son of the Rev. Josephus Chapman, pastor of the chapel. He died aged 6 on the 28th January 1830 and was buried on the 5th February 1830 “...in the chapel before the pulpit by Rev George Redford.” It is highly likely that Martin Chapman corresponds to context (197) (Fig 4, grave cut [175]), as he was the only juvenile recorded as being buried within the chapel, and only one juvenile of this age was recovered during excavation.

Further information about the Rev Joseph Chapman can be found in (Stevens, 1930).



Plate 11: Context (197), probably Martin Chapman

The Banfields

The Reverend Joel Banfield was pastor at the chapel from 1793-1820. A plaque on the wall of the chapel commemorates the death of Rev Banfield on the 6th May 1820, his wife Effe in 1808 and his second wife Harriet on the 8th September 1815. A grave containing three bodies, two females and one male, was excavated from within the chapel (**Fig 4**, grave cuts [124] and [230]), and it is highly likely that these three are the Banfields.



Plate 12: Context (127), probably Rev Joel Banfield

Mary Hopkins

Mary was the wife of the Rev Louis Hopkins, 20 years pastor of the chapel. She died in her 86th year on the 27th November and buried at the entrance of the front door of the chapel on the 2nd day of December 1831. It is possible that she corresponds with context (228) (**Fig 4**, grave cut [130]).



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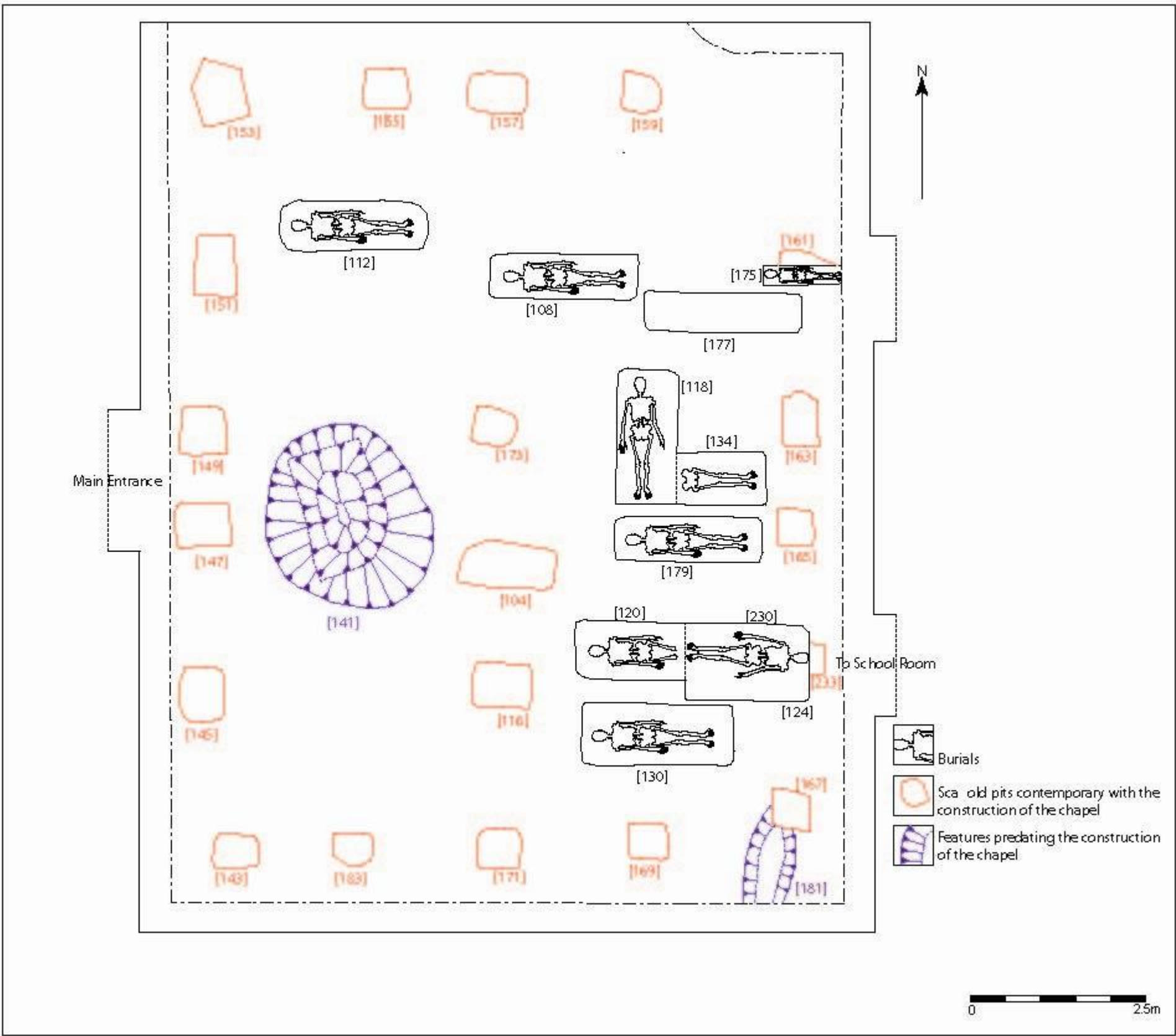


Fig 4: Plan of features within the chapel

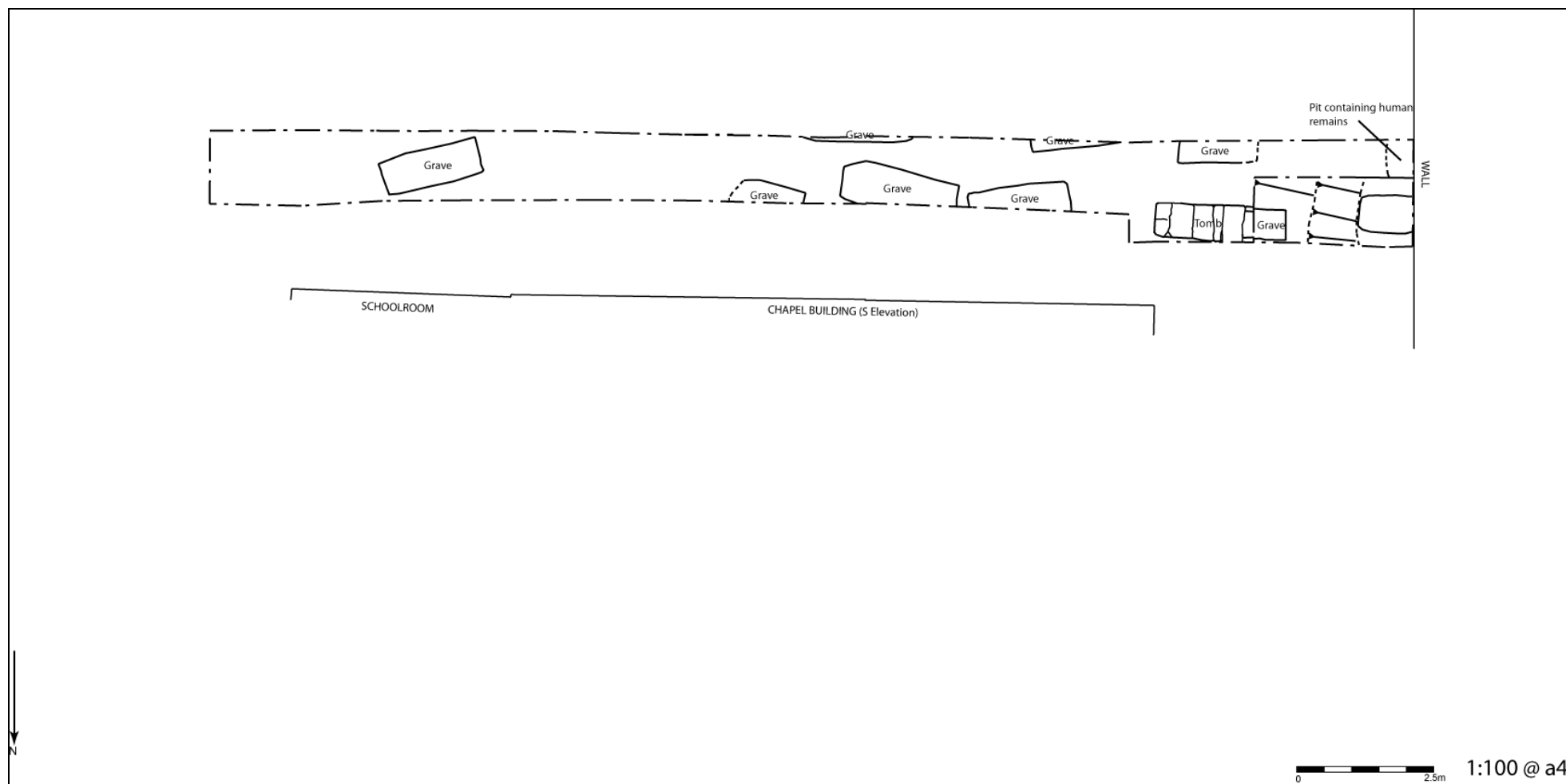


Fig 5: Plan of features outside the chapel

