

St Mary the Virgin Church
Long Crendon
Buckinghamshire

**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



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St Mary the Virgin Church Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

Between the 13th and 20th December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Mary the Virgin Church, Long Crendon (NGR SP 697 090). The work was commissioned by Acanthus Clews Architects on behalf of the Incumbent and Church Wardens in advance of the excavation of approximately 30 m of service trenching north and west of the church. The watching brief revealed 15 inhumations aligned west- east 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 13th and 20th December 2007, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin, Long Crendon, Bucks. (NGR SP 697 090). 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 within the churchyard to the north and north-west of the church.

1.1.2 The works were undertaken in accordance with the project brief prepared by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor (DAA), Julian Munby, in July 2007.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The village of Long Crendon in Buckinghamshire is located approximately nine miles south west of Aylesbury, and two miles north- west of Thame in Oxfordshire (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 north and east by open fields, and to the west and south by residential dwellings. The site lies on sands and limestone (Portland formation) over Kimmeridge Clay (British Geological Survey Mapsheet 237), at c. 104 m above OD.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared from Pevsener's *Buildings of England* (Pevsner and Williamson 1994) as well as from the work of Page (1927). The origins of Long Crendon are little understood although an Iron Age settlement and a Roman cemetery have been found nearby. Through the ages the village was largely dependent on agriculture, but in the medieval period the wool trade became an important part of the local economy. Needle-making was an important industry between the early 16th to mid-19th centuries. Lace-making was introduced in the 18th century (Pevsner and Williamson 1994, 444).

- 1.3.2 The main body of St Mary the Virgin Church was constructed in the 13th century of which the nave, the chancel and the south aisle and crossing survive today. There is a blocked window in the west gable of earlier date, possibly of Norman date. The north aisle and transept are 14th century, whilst the remainder of the building are of 15th and 16th century date. Some restoration and alteration to the church fabric took place in the 17th century, and in 1890-1891, a major restoration programme was carried out by Sir Arthur Blomfield. The churchyard has been used for burial since medieval times and is still in use today.

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 discussed 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 guidelines to the excavation of Christian burial grounds set out by English Heritage and The Church of England (2005).

- 2.2.2 The service trench was mechanically excavated under archaeological supervision, using a mini-digger fitted with a 0.5 m short-toothed bucket. 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 of impact 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 a representative section of the trench baulk (Fig. 4) was drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide, black and white print film and digital photography. A general photographic record of the work was made.
- 2.2.7 A rapid examination of the discrete articulated inhumations was made by a qualified osteoarchaeologist, and the preservation of the bone, the age and sex of the skeleton, and pathological lesions (diseases and injuries) were recorded.
- 2.2.8 Following rapid osteological examination, all human remains 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 (4.60 m) ran south- north and was located to the north of the church building. The trench turned south- west (c. 22.0 m) just beyond the north porch of the church, and extended to the existing entrance gate and boundary wall of the churchyard. The new drainage pipe within the trench is to connect to an existing mains foul water drain that runs along Church Road under the present tarmac surface of the road, and bordering the present cemetery (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.2 The trench was approximately 0.65 m wide throughout. Its depth was 1.40 m below the present ground level.
- 3.1.3 The underlying natural geology (31), a compact yellow clay deposit with sparse small (<2cm) inclusions, was only found in one part of the trench, below skeletons 29 and

30. This layer was identified at approximately 1.10 m from the present ground level (1) and located at c.3 m from the west entrance gate and boundary wall.
- 3.1.4 The natural geology was overlain by the graveyard soil (3), a layer of fairly loose disturbed mid-greyish brown silty sandy clay with occasional limestone fragments (<2.5 cm). This graveyard soil was present throughout the trench at a minimum depth of 1.40 m, except in the section of trench where the natural geology (31) was identified at 1.10 m, and in areas where it had been truncated by modern service trenches (25, 37 and 38). A total of 15 burials, four discrete charnel deposits and a large quantity of disarticulated human bone were revealed in this deposit (Fig. 3). A small amount of animal bone (less than 10 elements) was identified during the collection of the human charnel. Layer 3 was sealed by a layer of organic topsoil and turf (1) with a variation in depth throughout the trench of 0.20 m to 0.40 m.
- 3.1.5 A layer of irregular limestone slabs was encountered north of the northern porch of the church building (Fig. 4). This was later interpreted as a possible path leading from the northern porch aligned south- north direction.
- 3.1.6 An inspection was made of the trench opened in Church Road beyond the present graveyard boundaries. This trench was excavated in order to connect a water meter and to construct a manhole. The depth of this trench was approximately 0.8 m, its width c.0.5 m and its length c.25 m. No burials or any archaeological features of interest were found in this area. Only modern tarmac, concrete and pipes were present.

Earth cut graves

- 3.1.7 No graves cuts were defined within the graveyard soil, due to modern disturbance and due to the difficulty in distinguishing the backfill of the graves from the dark graveyard soil into which they were cut- a common feature of churchyard excavations.

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Relatively little archaeological dating evidence was recovered. No pottery fragments were found within the graveyard soil. Grave groups 7, 24 and 35 included the remains of coffins. Coffin 7 was represented by two fixing nails, found near the pelvis of the skeleton. Coffin 24 was represented by two iron coffin grips, which are typically 18th or 19th century in date (C. Boston, pers. comm.). In addition, this context (24) included four iron fixing nails, two iron upholstery studs and fragments of iron plate that had been dipped in tin, possibly a grip plate. This coffin was associated with an adult male skeleton. The coffin remains were found at the level of the leg bones (tibiae and fibulae), which was the only part of this skeleton to be recovered.
- 3.2.2 Remnants of the coffin of burial 35 included fragments of wood, at least eleven iron fixing nails, and fragments of iron upholstery studs. In addition, there were at least two, possibly three, copper alloy shroud pins found near the skull. Fragments of textile were attached to the shafts of these pins. In the post-medieval period, the

coffin was often lined with a loose coffin sheet or cloth, which was placed under the corpse and draped over the sides when the coffin was still open, prior to burial. In this period it was customary prior to burial to lay out the body in an open coffin within the house of surviving family members. Mourners would visit the house to pay their respects to the deceased, and view the corpse (May 2000). The aesthetics of the laying out was thus particularly important. Just prior to burial the coffin sheet was folded back within the coffin and the lid nailed or screwed in place. The copper alloy pins recovered from burial 35 probably held the coffin sheet in place around the head.

- 3.2.3 At least seven buttons were also recovered from this grave. These were located near the head end of the coffin, with the exception of the smallest button, which was located near the left wrist bones. These were plain copper alloy buttons of probable 18th or 19th century date (C. Boston, pers. comm.). Such clothes fastenings are not uncommon among post-medieval burials, and reflect the dressing of the corpse for burial. Janaway (1998) comments that in the later post-medieval period there was considerable variety in dressing the dead. Increasingly over the 18th century, the corpse was laid out in a nightgown- like shroud, most commonly fastened with textile ties, but occasionally with buttons. Alternatively, the deceased was dressed in personal everyday clothing (Litten 1991, 81; Janaway 1998, 24). The presence of buttons in burial 35 may reflect that either the corpse was shrouded or had been buried in everyday garments. No other personal effects were found in the St Mary's assemblage.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No palaeo-environmental sampling was undertaken.

3.4 The human remains

- 3.4.1 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). Subadult individuals were aged based on epiphyseal fusion and long bone lengths (Scheuer and Black 2000) and dental development (Moorrees *et al.* 1963, Smith 1991). 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.
- 3.4.2 A total of 15 skeletons were excavated and recorded (Fig. 3). For health and safety reasons (collapsing sections), three skeletons could not be recorded *in situ*. These were skeletons 16, 24 and 33. Their location is shown in Fig. 3.
- 3.4.3 None of the skeletons were complete. In most cases, less than 50% of the skeleton was present or could be recovered. This incompleteness was in part due to the partial exhumation of the remains (within the limits of the excavation), and in other cases due to inter-cutting graves or truncation by previous modern disturbance during the

installation of service pipes, cables and a soakaway. For example, skeletons 29 and 30 had 'dry' or 'old' breaks of the limb bones, likely the result of truncation during excavation of a soakaway. The bones were in a very good state of preservation. In most cases the cortical bone was very well or excellently preserved.

- 3.4.4 All of the skeletons were adult (>18 years of age at death). The remains of subadults were only observed in the charnel deposits. Of the adults, three were females or possible females and five were males or possible males. The ages ranged from young (18-25 years) to older individuals (>45 years). The specific adult age range of some skeletons could not be determined on site and thus were simply classified as adult (>18 years).
- 3.4.5 Stature could be calculated for four adults. From on site measurements of the bones, the estimated stature of female skeleton 34 was 1.63 m, whilst the three male individuals ranged between 1.76 m and 1.79 m, with an average male stature of 1.77 m. Although the St Mary's assemblage was very small, these averages were in fact slightly higher than the mean stature for post-medieval Britain (1.60 m in females and 1.71 m in males) (Roberts and Cox 2003, 308, 396).
- 3.4.6 Joint disease was the most common pathological condition in this assemblage. Adult skeleton 12 had osteoarthritis on the right elbow (specifically the distal epiphysis of the humerus). Osteoarthritis is a disease of the synovial joints and is the most common pathological conditions in archaeological and modern populations (Rogers and Waldron 1995). The changes in the joint includes a combination of bone growth (osteophytosis), deformity of the joint contour, pitting on the surface and eburnation (polished surface) (Rogers and Waldron 1995). The vertebral bodies of thoracic vertebrae of young adult female skeleton 33 displayed depressions, known as Schmorl's nodes. These lesions are caused by herniation of the intervertebral discs, and although associated with degenerative changes due to wear and tear of the spine over time, have also been linked to strenuous activity and trauma (Jurmain 1999). Due to her young age, it is possible that these lesions may have been activity -related (e.g. carrying heavy loads).
- 3.4.7 Skeleton 13, a possible male aged between 35 and 45 years at death, had fusion of the anterior bodies of six thoracic vertebrae, giving this section of the spinal column a dripped candle wax appearance. These changes are characteristic of diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (DISH). This spinal condition is of unknown cause, but may be associated with obesity and diabetes (Roberts and Manchester 1995, 120).
- 3.4.8 Dental pathology was problematic to observe due to soil adhering to the teeth. Skeleton 34 had an edentulous mandible (all his teeth had lost during life).
- 3.4.9 The above pathological conditions were common in post-medieval Britain (Roberts and Cox 2003).
- 3.4.10 Table 1 below presents a summary of these results.

Table 1. Summary of the on site osteological analysis

Skeleton	Completeness	Condition	Age	Sex	Stature	Observations/Pathology
7	<25%	Excellent (0)	35-45 years	Female?	-	-
10	<25%	Excellent (0)	25-35 years?	?	-	-
11	25-50%	Excellent (0)	35-45 years?	Male?	-	Heavy dental wear. Prominent maxillary and palatine tori
12	<25%	Excellent (0)	Adult (>18 years)	?	-	Osteoarthritis at distal epiphysis of right humerus
13	25-50%	Very good (1)	35-45 years?	Male?	1.77 m	Bone for stature: left humerus = 34.8 cm. Fused sternal end, ossified cartilage, DISH (6 fused thoracic vertebrae)
14	<25%	Excellent (0)	Adult (>18 years)	?	-	Long bone epiphyses fused
16	<25%	Excellent (0)	Adult (>18 years)	?	-	Long bone epiphyses fused
17	<25%	Excellent (0)	Adult (>23 years)			Long bone epiphyses and iliac crest fused
20	<25%	Very good (1)	Adult (>18 years)	?	-	Long bone epiphyses fused
24	<25%	Good (2)	Adult (>35 years)	Male	1.76 m	Bone for stature: left tibia = 34.3 cm. Sacrum (S1 and S2) fused.
29	25-50%	Good (2)	Adult (>18 years)	?	-	-
30	25-50%	Good (2)	Adult (>18 years)	Male?	-	-
33	25-50%	Very good (1)	18-25 years	Female	-	Young adult aged from auricular surface of pelvis and dental wear. Pelvis is diagnostic of female individual. Schmorl's nodes on thoracic vertebrae
34	25-50%	Very good (1)	>45 years	Female?	1.63 m	Bone for stature: right tibia = 35.0 cm. Edentulous mandible
35	50-75%	Very good (1)	18-25 years	Male	1.79 m	Bone for stature: left humerus = 35.3 cm. Very young adult (c.18 years) according to pubic symphysis, auricular surface, dental wear, emerging status of third molar. Male pelvis and skull.

3.4.11 A large quantity of disarticulated bone was recovered across the site. Several discrete channel deposits were identified (e.g. deposits 8 and 15 (Fig. 3)). These clusters of bones did not appear to have been deposited within a clearly defined cut. Most of the channel was probably the result of disturbing earlier graves when digging new ones. Modern disturbance (such as service trenches) would have also contributed to the presence of disarticulated bone.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 St Mary the Virgin's Church was built in the 13th century and it is assumed that burial in the churchyard took place from medieval times to the present day. A total of 15 skeletons were recovered from the service trench. Coffin fittings from burials 24 and 35 dated these particular graves to the 18th or 19th centuries. The date of the remaining burials is unknown, but are clearly associated with the church.

- 4.1.2 All of the burials were aligned roughly west- east, with the head to the west. This orientation is typical of Christian burials. At least three skeletons (7, 24 and 35) were buried within coffins, as indicated by the presence of coffin nails and fittings.
- 4.1.3 In terms of the buried population, the sample was too small to undertake meaningful demographic analysis. Males and females were represented, as is typical of a parish church assemblage, but subadults were under-represented. This may in part be explained by the fact that the small and fragile nature of subadult bones renders them particularly vulnerable to destruction within the buried environment. The zoning of burials is another explanation. For example, Gilchrist and Sloane (2005, 67) have highlighted that the zoning of burials by age is evident in some medieval churchyards, with some areas being particularly favoured for infant burials. Thus, subadult burials dating to this earlier period in St Mary's churchyard may well have occupied a particular location that lay outside the excavation area. The size of the excavation area was too limited to explore this argument further, however. In addition, the longevity of burial in the churchyard probably extended over 600- 700 years, and the lack of dating evidence made phasing of the burials extremely problematic. It is highly probable that many of the burials dated to a later period when the medieval practice of zoning was not applied.
- 4.1.4 The density of burial activity varied considerably in the trench, with areas of frequent intercutting graves (e.g. skeletons 7, 10, 11 and 13 (Fig. 3)) interspersed with areas of less intercutting. This pattern may not reflect the true distribution of graves within the churchyard, however, as it reflects only those burials that were shallower than the impact level. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing grave cuts within the graveyard soil, it was impossible to identify the location of deeper burials. Given the probable longevity of burial on this site, a much higher density of burial is probable than that reflected in this watching brief.
- 4.1.5 The excavated skeletons and coffin nails and fittings were reburied within the trench prior to backfilling.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Table A.1. Watching brief context summary

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth from ground level</i>	<i>Thickness of deposit</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1	Layer	-	-	-	Variable	Topsoil and turf throughout churchyard
2	Fill	>5 m	>0.70 m	0.15 m	0.60 m	Backfill of pre-existing pipe trench
3	Layer	c. 30 m	>0.60 m	>0.15 m	>1.40 m	Very disturbed graveyard soil
7	Grave group	>0.60 m	c.0.50 m	1.25 m	-	Cut, coffin, skeleton and backfill. Includes two coffin nails
8	Charnel deposit	>0.40 m	>0.40 m	>1.25 m	>0.20 m	Human skull and long bones. Subadult and adult
9	Charnel deposit	>0.25 m	>0.40 m	0.90 m	0.30 m	Human skull and long bones. Subadult and adult. Some non-human bone
10	Grave group	>0.30 m	>0.40 m	0.45 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Skull and vertebrae only. Truncated by modern disturbance
11	Grave group	>1.10 m	>0.50 m	0.90 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
12	Grave group	>0.30 m	> 0.05m	0.90 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
13	Grave group	>0.60 m	>0.50 m	1.35 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
14	Grave group	>0.50 m	>0.15 m	1.10 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
15	Charnel deposit	>0.35 m	> 0.25 m	1.15 m	>0.25 m	Skull and long bones. Adult bones identified.
16	Grave group	-	-	-	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Not recorded <i>in situ</i> due to Health and Safety issues
17	Grave group	>0.45 m	>0.25 m	1.00 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
18	Fill	1.00 m	>0.60 m	0.20 m	0.55 m	Modern fill above 19
19	Fill	>0.80 m	1.00 m	0.75 m	0.45 m	Possible fill below 18, undated (modern?). Composed of natural but also worked stone. Re-used debris?
20	Grave group	>0.45 m	>0.30 m	1.06 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Probably truncated by 26
21	Masonry	>0.60 m	1.30 m	0.30 m	0.15 m	Path probably running South-North and leading from the North porch of the church

						building
22	Fill	4.00 m	>0.60 m	0.10 m	0.25 m	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Probably truncated by 26
24	Grave group	-	-	-	-	Cut, coffin, skeleton and backfill. Not recorded <i>in situ</i> (collapsed section). Coffin grips and fixing nails present (18th/19th century)
25	Fill	c. 17 m	0.60 m	0.20 m	1.20 m	Backfill of pre-existing service trench. Fill of 26
26	Cut	c. 17 m	0.60 m	0.25 m	1.40 m	Pre-existing service trench. Filled by 25 and 38
27	Fill	c. 1.00 m	0.75 m	0.20 m	1.40 m	Backfill of pre-existing soakaway pit. Fill of 28
28	Cut	c. 1.00 m	0.75 m	0.20 m	1.40 m	Pit for pre-existing soakaway. Filled by 27. Trench 26 leads to this soakaway
29	Grave group	>0.45 m	>0.30 m	0.60 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 28
30	Grave group	>1.10 m	> 0.30 m	0.60 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Truncated by 28
31	Layer	>1.50 m	>0.60 m	>0.50 m	>0.90 m	Natural deposit
32	Layer	>0.60 m	c. 0.80 m	0.30 m	0.20 m	Irregular limestone layer
33	Grave group	-	-	-	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill. Not recorded <i>in situ</i> (disturbance by machining)
34	Grave group	>1.60 m	>0.25 m	0.90 m	-	Cut, skeleton and backfill
35	Grave group	1.30 m	>0.60 m	0.75 m	-	Cut, coffin, skeleton and backfill. Coffin nails, buttons and pins
36	Layer	>0.50 m	>0.60 m	0.30 m	0.70 m	Modern layer of electrical cables buried below topsoil and churchyard entrance path
37	Fill	c. 17 m	0.60 m	>1.20 m	>0.30 m	Modern shingle backfill surrounding pre-existing pipe in trench 28
38	Fill	-	-	Ground level in some areas	>1.00 m	Shingle throughout parts of site, and around supporting walls at either side of northern porch

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APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St Mary the Virgin Church, Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire

Site code: LOCRSM07

Grid reference: SP 697 090

Type of watching brief: One 30 m service trench within churchyard

Date and duration of project: Watching brief undertaking from 13th to 20th December 2007

Area of site: c. 18 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief during works for a service trench revealed the presence of 16 inhumations aligned west- east as well as a quantity of charnel. Little evidence was recovered to enable dating of these inhumations although the few coffin fittings recovered seem to be post-medieval in date. 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 Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: AYBCM: 2007.205



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Figure 1: Site location

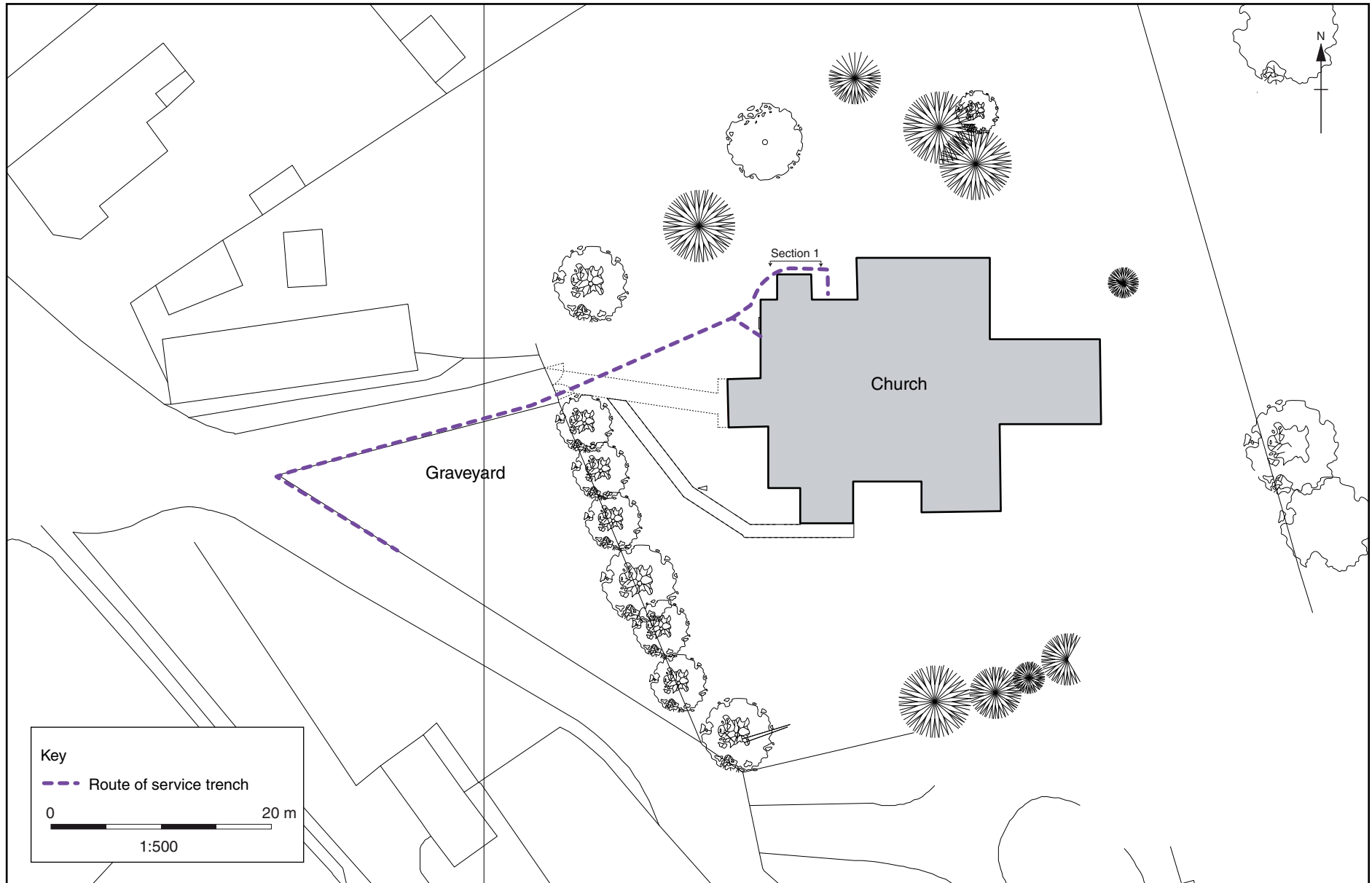
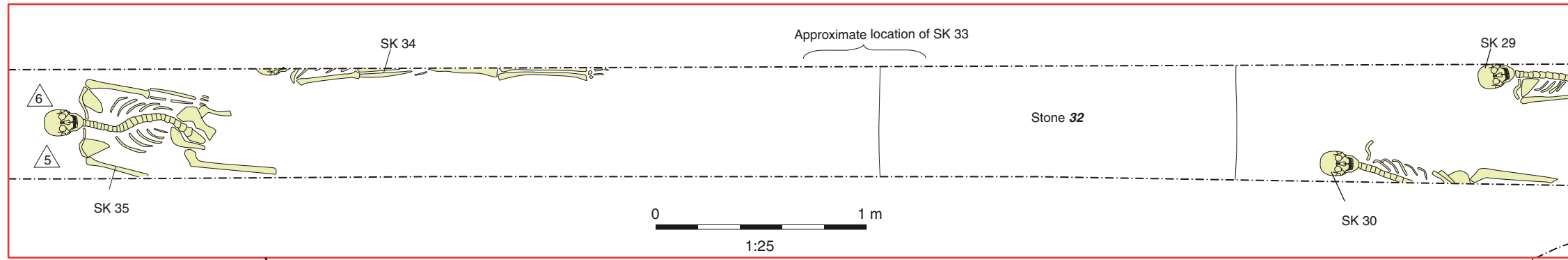
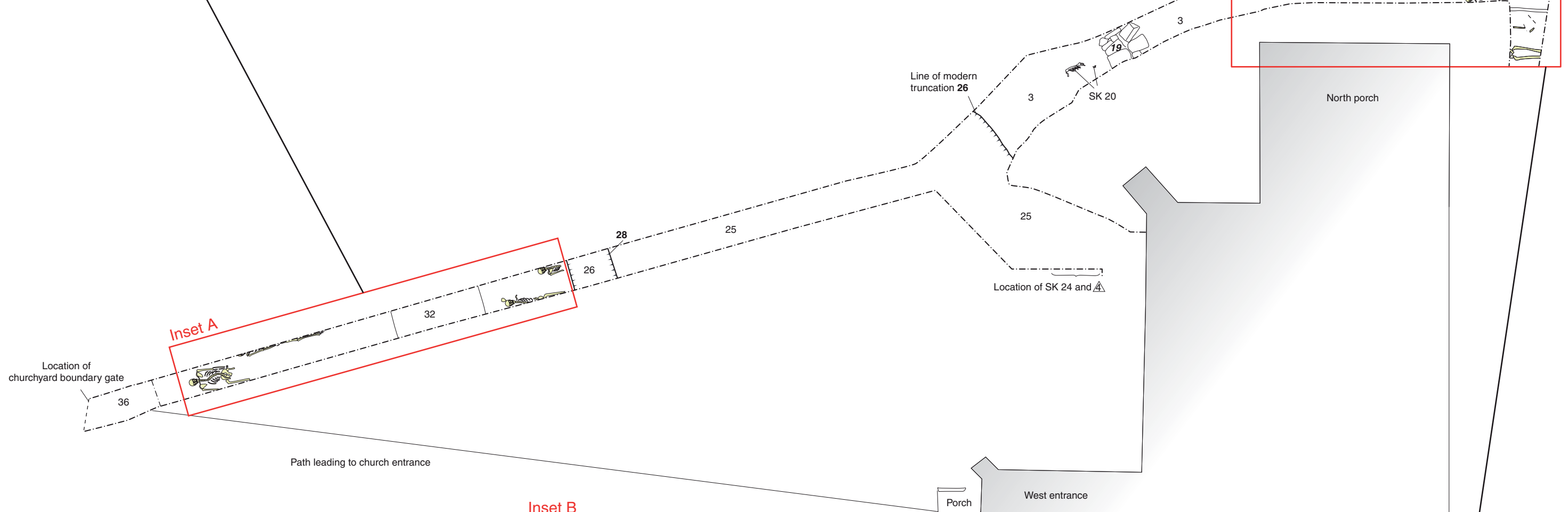
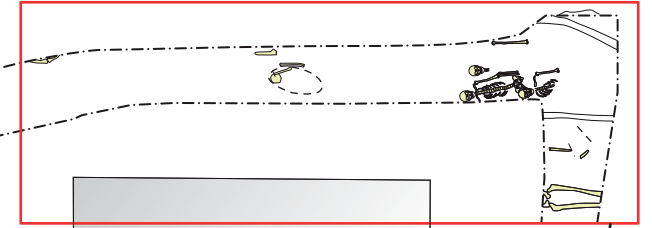


Figure 2: Plan showing Church and route of service trench

Inset A



Inset B



Inset B

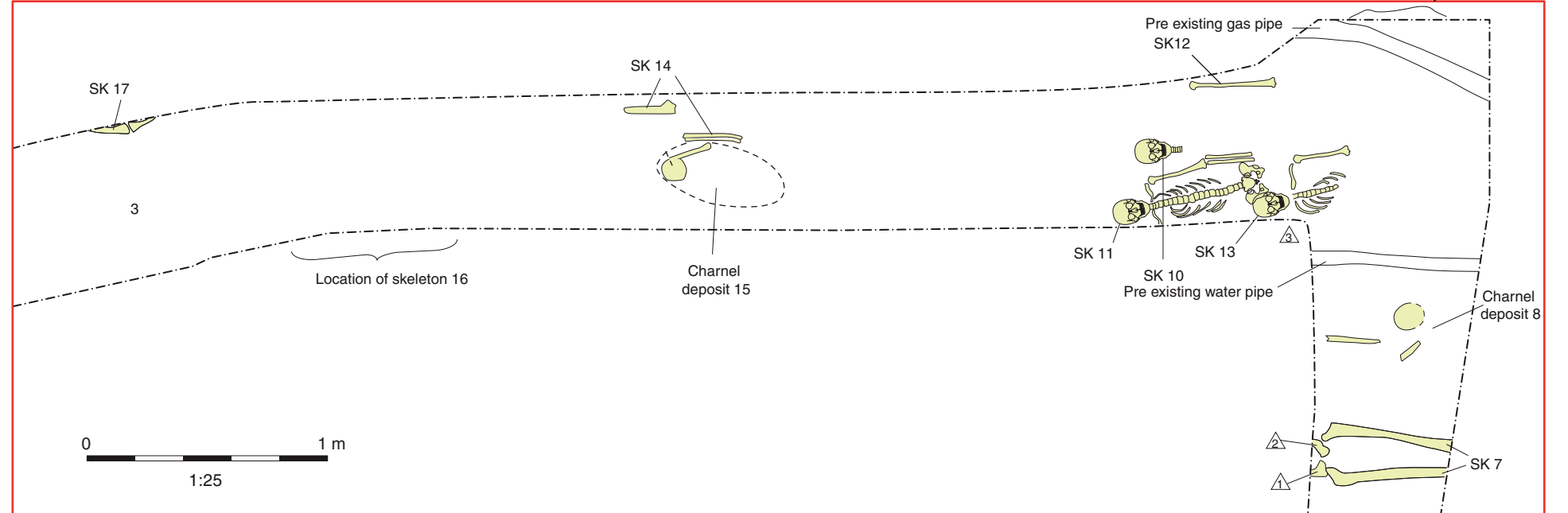


Figure 3: Plan showing the location of burials

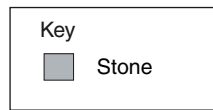
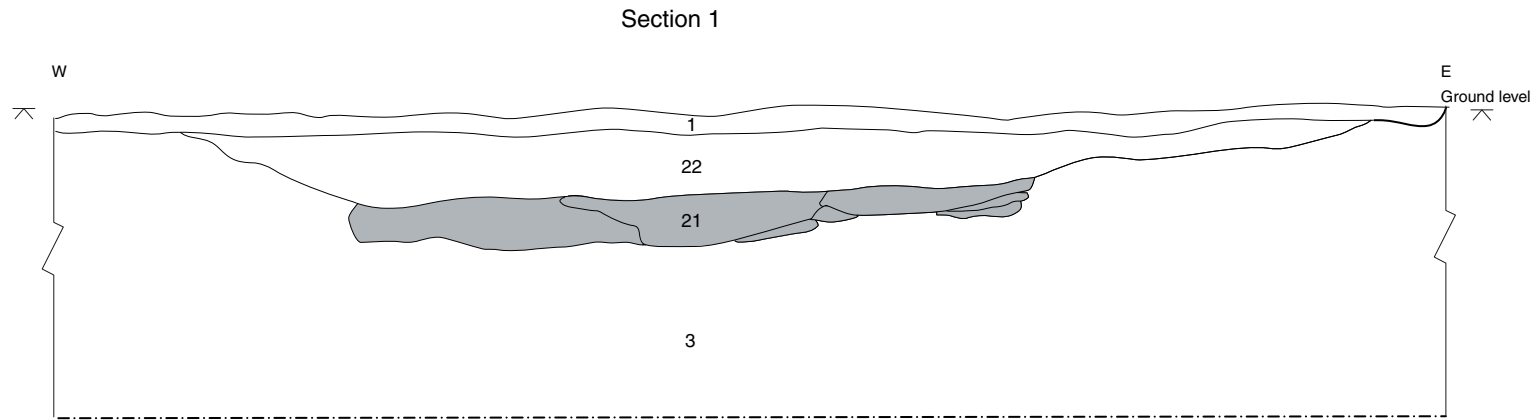


Figure 4: Section 1



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