

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

ST. MARY'S CHURCH,

WAVENDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NGR SP 9115 3720

SEPTEMBER 2011

REPORT FOR St. Mary's Church, Wavendon
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief at St Mary's Church graveyard, Wavendon. Twenty-two burials (sixteen in the West Tower, and six in the drainage trench) and one crypt were uncovered. The burials from within the West Tower were all juvenile dating from the 13th century. The burials uncovered in the drainage trench were undated.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

St Mary's Church is situated in the village of Wavendon east of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, within the area administered by Milton Keynes Council. The church of St Mary's lies in the centre of the village (NGR: SP9115 3720). The geology is Till.

1.2 Planning Background

The Incumbent and Churchwardens of St Mary's Church, Wavendon appointed Acanthus Clews Architects to oversee the excavation of the floor in the West Tower and drainage. As the alterations were likely to disturb human remains a programme of archaeological recording during groundwork was conducted that was approved by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The work was undertaken within the West Tower and burial ground surrounding St. Mary's Church. The earliest surviving parts of the church, i.e. the chancel arch and arcades date to 13th century. The west tower was added in the 15th century. In the 1848-49 the church underwent entire restoration and modernisation overseen by William Butterfield (Pevsner & Williamson 1994).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation were as follows:

- to record and lift any burials encountered during the course of the work
- to excavate and record any archaeological features identified within the churchyard
- to provide a report and ordered archive on the investigation.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work in the burial ground of St. Mary's Church in Wavendon. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were

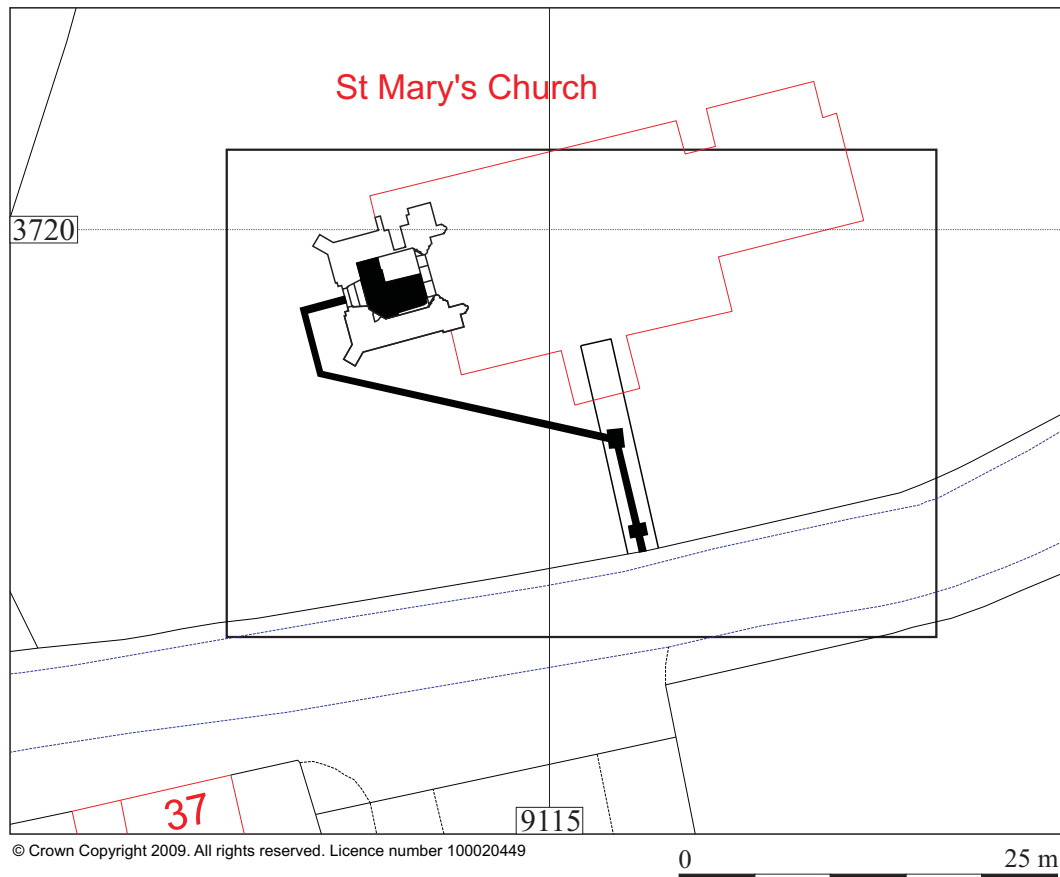
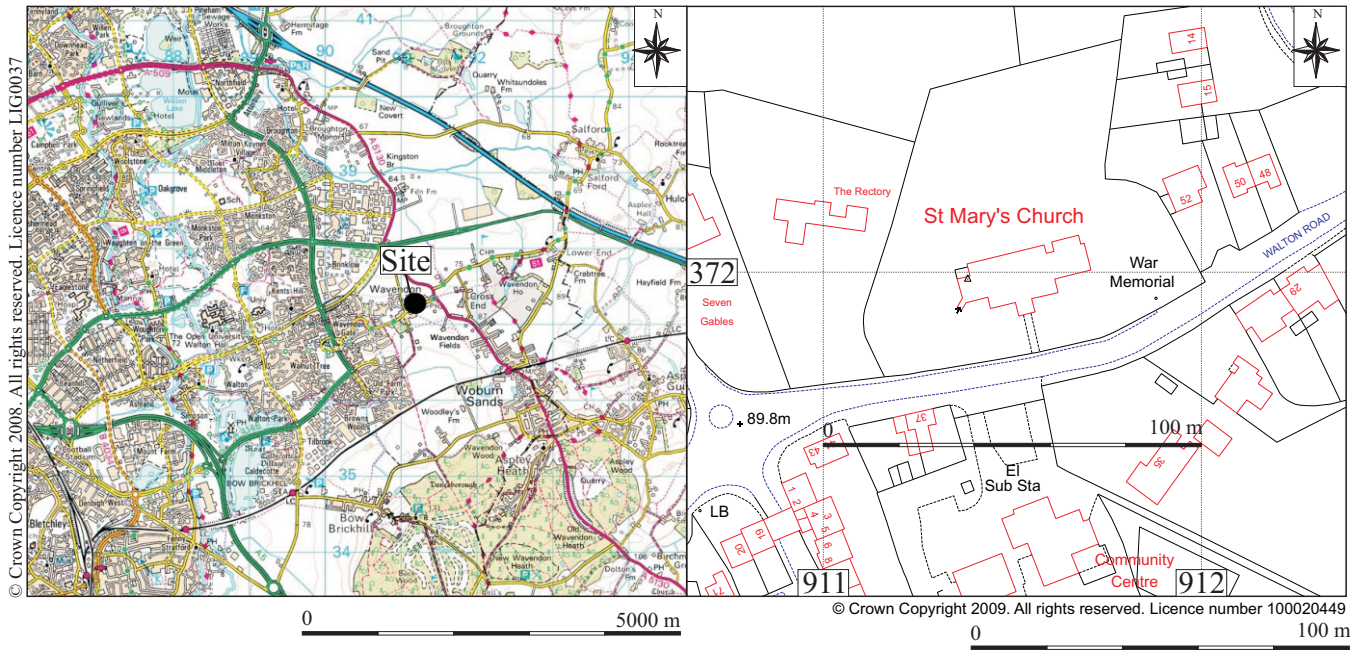


Figure 1. Site location

employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each feature encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the procedures laid down in MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist monitored the excavation of the reduction of the floor level within the West Tower and drainage trenches running from the West Tower to the entrance gate. The human remains were removed where possible, however the depth of the groundwork in the West Tower was altered to reduce the number of skeletons being exposed. The drainage perimeter trench running around the eastern half of the church was inspected and recorded.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each feature, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible. A photographic record was produced.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 West Tower lower level (Figure 2)

The lowest deposit encountered within the West Tower was natural (13), which was a mottled orange brown compact sandy gravel. The full depth was not observed. Cut into (13) were grave cuts 14, 16 and 18. They were not excavated as they were below the level of impact.

Grave cut 18 was 0.30m long x 0.18m wide; the grave was seen to extend under the entrance to the West Tower. Only the top of the 18 was uncovered. It was filled with a loose dark grey brown sandy clay containing small stone inclusions no larger than 0.02m (19).

Grave cut 16 was only partially visible, being 0.34m long x 0.14 m wide, depth unknown. It contained fill (15) and SK 15. (15) was a loose, dark grey brown sandy clay. Only the top of the skull SK 15 was visible.

Either cutting, or cut by 16 was grave cut 14, which was only partly visible. It was 0.10m wide and 0.42m long as seen. It was filled with (17) and skeleton 14. (17) was a moderately compact mottled orange brown sandy gravel with small gravel inclusions no larger than 0.03m c. 25%. Only the top of the skull of skeleton 14 was visible.

Cut 20 contained skeleton 16. Only the cut at the western end was visible. It was filled with (21), a loose dark grey brown sandy clay with 0.02 small bone c. 3% and

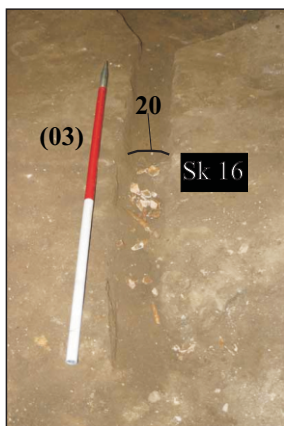
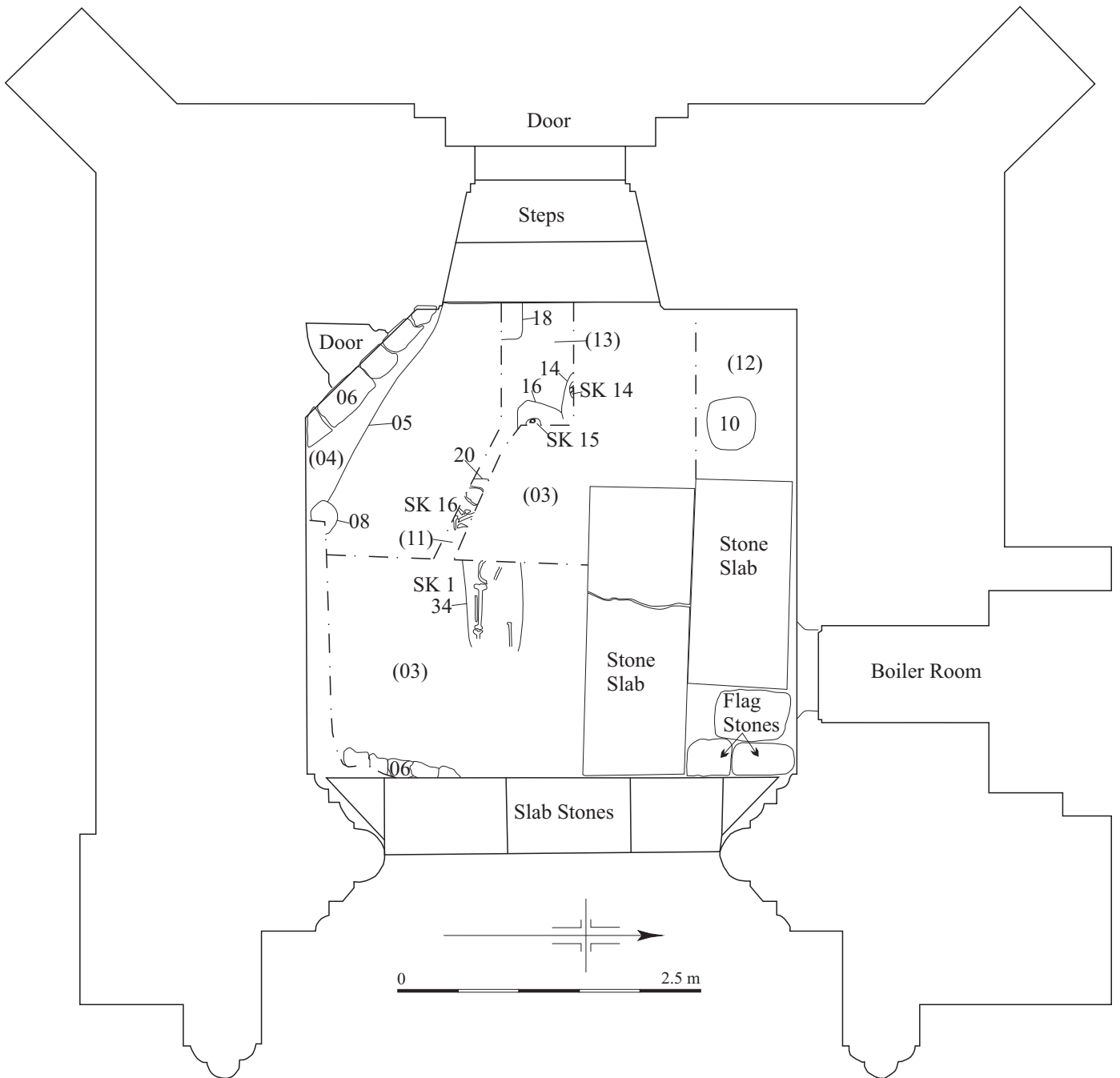


Plate 1. West looking
SK 16 and grave cut 20

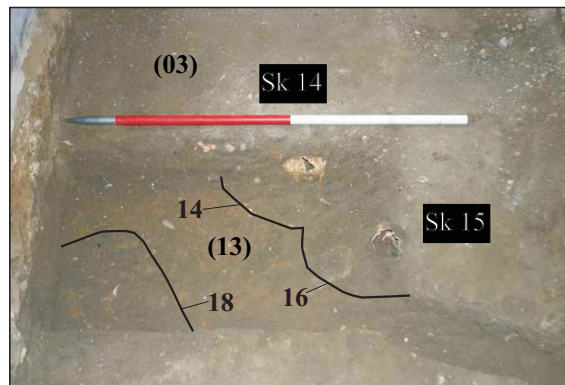


Plate 2. Lower level Sk's 14 & 15

Figure 2. West Tower lower level

contained skeleton 16. Skeleton 16 was composed of some vertebrae and ribs, with the possibility of the right humerus present also. The skeleton did not appear to be in good condition, so it was difficult to see exactly what remained, or indeed to obtain exact measurements

Cut 34 contained fill (35) and skeleton 1. 34 was 0.60m long x 0.50m wide as seen. It was not fully excavated. It was filled with (35), a loose dark grey brown sandy clay with 0.02% small gravel. A fragmentary pelvis, the left femur and the left and right tibia represented skeleton 1.

4.2 West Tower upper level (Figure 3.)

Overlying natural (13) was grave soil (03). It was impossible to distinguish any grave cuts within (03). (03) was a moderately compact, dark grey silty sandy clay containing c 15% small stone no larger than 0.02m with 20% charcoal flecking. It was 0.24m thick and was present across the entire area. Found within (03) were skeletons SK 2-13, which were either juvenile or neonatal skeletons.

Skeleton 2 lay just above skeleton 6. The observed dimensions were 0.90m by 0.30m. Skeleton 2 consisted of the thoracic vertebrae, sacrum, pelvis, left femur and the left and right tibia and fibula. The condition of the bone was considered to be poor, however the completeness of skeleton 2 was considered to be good.

Beneath skeleton 2 lay skeleton 6. It was 0.50m long x 0.14m wide. The majority of the skeleton was present; it appeared to be missing its left ulna and radius, carpals, metacarpals and phalanges. The condition of the skeleton was considered to be reasonable.

Skeleton 3 was a neonate skeleton and very fragmentary. Present were the left and right humerus, the lower part of the rib cage and the left and right scapula. It was 0.30m by 0.32m as seen.

Skeleton 4 was a neonate and very fragmentary. Only the top of the skull and some very small ribs were present.

Skeleton 5 was represented by a skull, the rest of skeleton 5 remained below the impact level.

Skeleton 7 was 0.80m long by 0.26m wide. The skeleton was relatively intact, however the left humerus and ulna were not present. The condition of the skeletal bones was thought to be poor. The later 15th Century West Tower wall had cut through the skeleton.

Skeleton 8 was cut by the West Tower wall. Only the pelvis, femurs, tibia and fibula, and feet bones were present. The condition of the skeleton was considered to be good. Skeleton 8 was 0.58m long and 0.30m wide.

Skeleton 9 was considered to be poorly preserved. Only the pelvis and right fibula were present. It was 0.27m long x 0.20m wide.

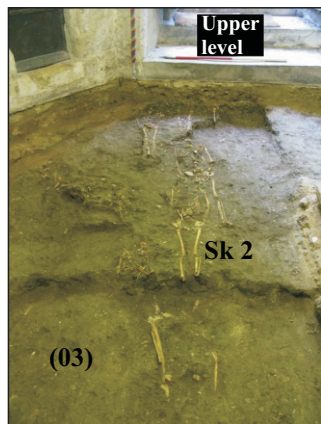


Plate 3. West looking skeletons upper level

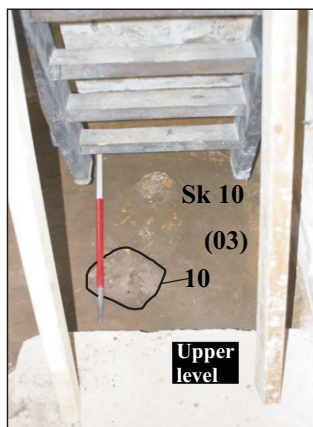


Plate 4. West looking Skeleton 10 cut by pit 10

Figure 3. West Tower upper level

Skeleton 12 was cut by 05, the foundation trench for the West Tower wall. It was poorly preserved, with only the skull, right clavicle, scapula, humerus, ulna, carpals and ribs being present. It was 0.35m long x 0.25m wide as seen.

Skeleton 13 had also been cut by 05, the foundation trench for the West Tower. Only the part of the spine, pelvis, left humerus and left and right femurs were present. It measured 0.35m long x 0.18m wide.

Grave cut 11 was a linear cut measuring 1.40m long x 0.79m as seen. It was filled with (12), a moderately compact, dark grey brown sandy clay containing c. 10% small gravel. Within (12) lay skeletons 10 & 11.

Skeleton 10 was cut by a later post-hole 10. The skull, spine, ribs left and right humerus radius and clavicle were present. SK 10 was 0.59m long x 0.35m wide.

Skeleton 11 had been cut by the 15th century West Tower wall. Only the tibia, tarsals, metatarsals and phalanges were observed. It was 0.20m long x 0.18m wide as seen.

Observed cutting through (13) was the foundation trench cut for the West Tower 05. 05 was irregular in plan, and was 2.10m long x 0.35m at its widest. 05 was not excavated due to the fact that it extended below the impact level. It was filled with wall 06 and backfill (04). Wall 06 was comprised of small angular limestone blocks, the largest being 0.50m long x 0.25m wide. Only one course was visible, and it had been bonded with a sandy mortar. Fill (04) was a loose mid orange brown sandy clay, containing small gravel <0.02m c 10-15%.

Cut through foundation cut 05 was post-hole 08, which had a diameter of 0.24m as seen. It was filled with (07), a compacted reddish orange brown clay. It contained c.20% charcoal flecking and 10% decomposed ironstone fragments. It was not excavated.

Cut through Skeleton 10, and into (12) was post-hole 10, which was 0.41m in diameter. It was filled with (09), a loose grey brown sandy clay. The depth is unknown, as it was below the impact level.

Overlying post-holes 08, 10, and grave fills (03) and (12) was (02), a mortar bed for the overlying floor surface. (02) was a loose light brown sand containing small stone inclusions < 0.07m x 0.04m. It was noted across the entire area.

Sitting on top of (02) was the floor 01. It was made up of flagstone and old gravestones, one of which could be made out to date to the seventeen hundreds, suggesting that the flooring was laid when the church was redecorated by William Butterfield in the 19th century. The floor had been bonded with cement and was only one course thick.

4.3 Drainage Trench

The drainage trench ran from the entrance of the West Tower to the entrance gates of the church. Burials 17-22 were observed in the trenching within the burial ground, however none were seen under the path to the church door. Natural deposits (13) (also

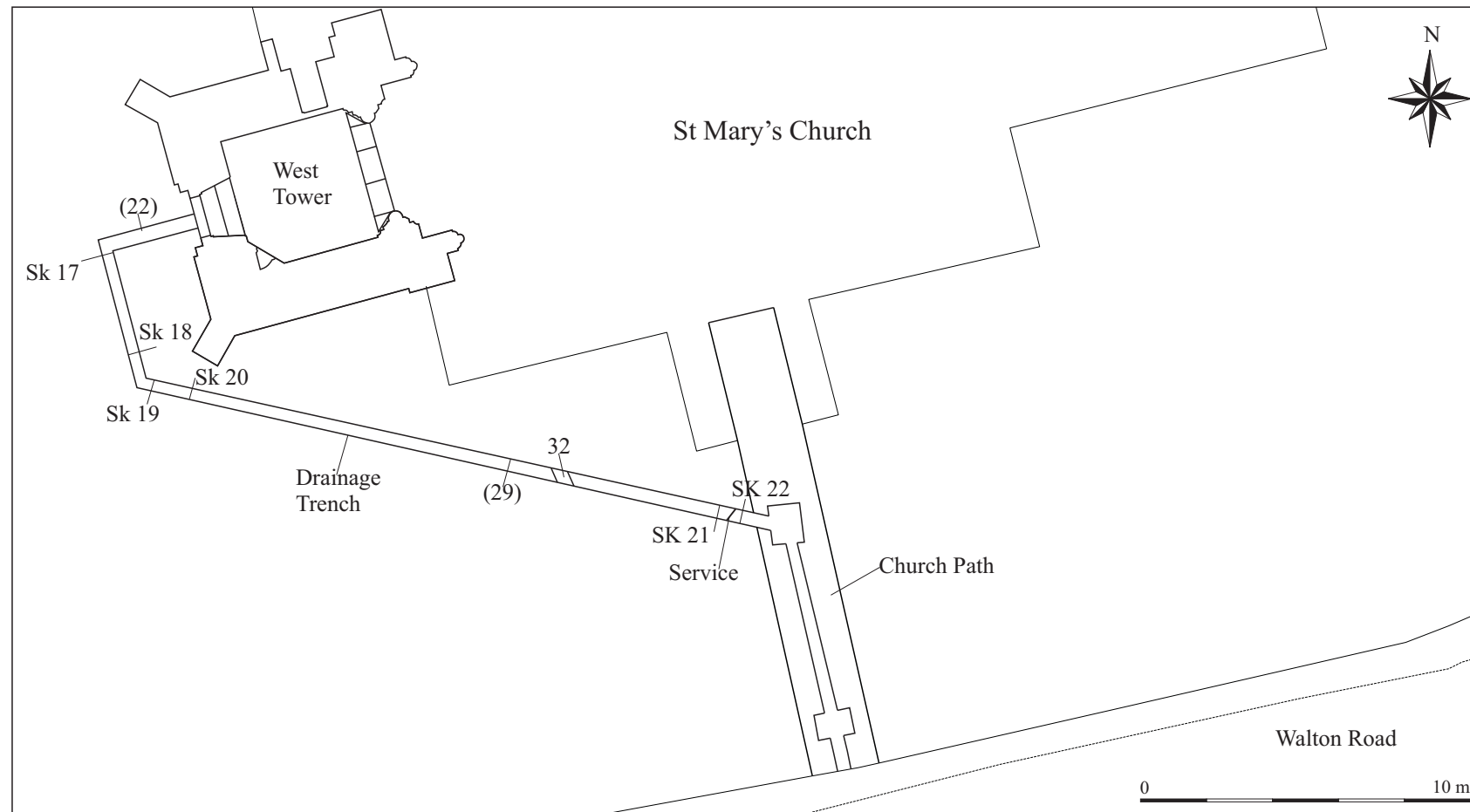


Plate 5. Drainage Trench looking north



Plate 6. Drainage trench looking south west

Figure 4. Plan of drainage trench

recorded as (26), referred to as (13) from here on in) were encountered at a depth of 1.20m. The drainage trench was only 0.40m wide, therefore the recovery of human bone was hampered by both the depth and the width of the trench. The general conditions of the skeletons found within the drainage trench are considered to be poor.

Skeleton 17 was located 2.50m from the entrance to the West Tower and observed at a depth of 1m. The top of the skull, 3 left ribs, left humerus, ulna, tibia and fibula were observed.

Skeleton 18 was found c.4.30m from the entrance to the West Tower and recorded at a depth of 1m and consisted of parts of the skull, the right radius, femur and phalanges, and the left fibula.

Skeleton 19 was located 18.2m from the church path, and observed at a depth of 0.80m. It consisted of the top of the skull, the left femur and tibia, and part of the right fibula.

Skeleton 20 was found 17.2m from the church path and recorded at a depth of 0.80m. The skull, left and right humerus, right femur and pelvis fragment, and left tibia was present.

Skeleton 21 was recorded at a depth of 0.80m and located 10m from the church path. Only the top of the skull was uncovered.

Skeleton 22 was recorded at a depth of 1.10m, and located 0.40m from the church path. A partial pelvis and left femur were observed.

The remains of crypt 32 was uncovered 5.60m from the church path. It was made from limestone and flint, the sizes of which were 0.19m x 0.10m. Three courses were visible and it was roughly finished. It was 0.40m wide and 0.50m wide as seen. It was filled with (30) & (31). The primary fill, presumed to be containing the inhumation, was (31), a loose grey clay silt containing small limestone fragments. It was excavated to a depth of 0.60m. Overlying (31) was (30), a loose grey brown silty clay containing 10% small pea gravel. It was 0.30m thick.

There were two more possible burials, however due to the fragmentary and poor condition of the bone, and the lack of any real completeness the excavator recorded them as areas of charnel, (22) and (29), and at a depth of between 0.70m - 1m.

Overlying the burials 17-22 and crypt 32 was subsoil (28), a loose light red brown clay silt, containing small pea sized gravels, and small limestone fragments. It was 0.13m thick.

Overlying subsoil (28) was topsoil (23), a loose dark grey brown clay silt containing 10% small stone < 0.02 – 0.04m.

4.4 Burial Practises

The burials at St. Mary's Church reflected the predominant Christian beliefs and were aligned in an east-west orientation, and lay in the supine position with the head at the

west end of the grave so that the individual would be facing the east looking towards Jerusalem at the time of Resurrection.

5 Finds

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

Four sherds of medieval pottery were noted, with a total weight of 11g. They all occurred in context (3) (graveyard soil under the West Tower). They were recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994), as follows:

They are all unglazed bodysherds, and although small, are in good condition, and appear reliably stratified.

MC1: *Shelly Coarseware*. AD1100-1400. 1 sherd, 1g.

MS3: *Medieval Grey Sandy Wares*. Mid 11th – late 14th century. 2 sherds, 5g.

MS9: *Brill/Boarstall Ware*. 1200-?1600. 1 sherd, 5g.

They are all common finds in the Milton Keynes region, and the assemblage as a whole most likely dates to the early 13th century, as Potterspurry Ware, a very common find on medieval sites of the mid-13th century and later in the area, is entirely absent.

5.2 Environmental Samples

No environmental samples were taken.

6 DISSCUSSION

The West Tower

All in all 22 child skeletons were uncovered, ranging from a very small neonate through to the early teens. They were buried close to the 13th century church, giving the burial group more significance. This assemblage does not represent a mass grave, rather a continued burial ground being used over a period of time. No bodies had been intercut, suggesting careful burial practises. It is clear that the juvenile graveyard would have been in use from the 13th century, going out of use before the West Tower was built during the mid 15th Century.

When William Butterfield refurbished the church during the 1848-49 period, the mortar layer (02) was laid as a bed for the flooring. The site must have been levelled as some of the skeletons had their facial bones removed (Sk's 6 & 3), and indeed may have disturbed any burials which may have been present at a slightly higher level in the area to the east of the site. Charnel was found in this area, suggesting that there may have been further skeletons pre 1848-49. Post-holes 08 & 10 most probably date back to the Butterfield refurbishment.

Drainage Trenching

Skeletons 17-22 and crypt 32 were uncovered during the course of the watching brief through the graveyard. The skeletons were found at various depths, showing the continued use of the graveyard over the centuries. No pottery was uncovered, so it is impossible to date the burials specifically, however the burials did not match the location on the existing grave stones, suggesting a pre Victorian date for the burials.

The excavation through the church path contained no burials and no evidence for an older burial ground, suggesting that entrance and route to the church entrance has been used, possibly since the 13th century. Whereas the depth of the natural (13) within the (west side) burial ground was recorded at a depth of 1.20m, the natural underlying the church path was observed at a depth of 0.40m.

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