



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Roman burials at
40 Church Lane, West Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
July 2010



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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS report form

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	West Wycombe, 40 Church Lane	
Short description	In July 2010, part of a human skull and other fragments of human bone were discovered by builders digging a trench against the north wall of 40 Church Lane, West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Human bones had been unearthed on previous occasions in the lane, but the age and circumstances of the burials was entirely unknown. To investigate further, the National Trust, the owners of the property, commissioned Northamptonshire Archaeology to carry out an archaeological excavation of the area on the north side of the cottage. This uncovered the remains of four individuals, one of which has been radiocarbon dated to the mid 3rd to early 5th centuries AD, from a row of graves cut into the chalk bedrock. The bone fragments discovered by the builders came from a late medieval/early post-medieval ditch that ran parallel to Church Lane and passed under the front wall of the cottage; the bones, of at least two individuals, probably came from other Roman graves disturbed by the cutting of the ditch. Two pits dating to the late 15th/early 16th century were encountered in the foundation trench for a new garden wall adjacent to Church Lane. The archaeology was sealed by a layer of subsoil and dark garden soil containing 18th- and 19th-century pottery and glass, and a part of a possible medieval rowel-spur.	
Project type	Excavation/watching brief	
Site status	None	
Previous work	None	
Current land use	Residential	
Future work	None	
Monument type/ period	Roman cemetery, late 15th/early 16th-century ditch and pits	
Significant finds	Four articulated skeletons, late 3rd/4th century	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Buckinghamshire	
Site address	40 Church Lane, West Wycombe	
OS Easting & Northing	48301 19577	
Area	c 15m ²	
Height OD	96m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	-	
Project Design originator	Simon Carlyle (NA)	
Director/Supervisor	Simon Carlyle (NA)	
Project Manager	Simon Carlyle (NA), Gary Marshall (NT)	
Sponsor or funding body	National Trust	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	12/7/10	
End date	22/7/10	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		Pottery and tile (1 box), human bone 6 boxes
Paper		Site records and related documents (1small archive box)
Digital		Digital photographs, digital report copies
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
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**ROMAN BURIALS AT
40 CHURCH LANE, WEST WYCOMBE
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
JULY 2010**

Abstract

In July 2010, part of a human skull and other fragments of human bone were discovered by builders digging a trench against the north wall of 40 Church Lane, West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Human bones had been unearthed on previous occasions in the lane, but the age and circumstances of the burials was entirely unknown. To investigate further, the National Trust, the owners of the property, commissioned Northamptonshire Archaeology to carry out an archaeological excavation of the area on the north side of the cottage. This uncovered the remains of four individuals, one of which has been radiocarbon dated to the mid 3rd to early 5th centuries AD, from a row of graves cut into the chalk bedrock. The bone fragments discovered by the builders came from a late medieval/early post-medieval ditch that ran parallel to Church Lane and passed under the front wall of the cottage; the bones, of at least two individuals, probably came from other Roman graves disturbed by the cutting of the ditch. Two pits dating to the late 15th/early 16th century were encountered in the foundation trench for a new garden wall adjacent to Church Lane. The archaeology was sealed by a layer of subsoil and dark garden soil containing 18th- and 19th-century pottery and glass, and a part of a possible medieval rowel-spur.

1 INTRODUCTION

In July 2010, Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out an archaeological excavation and watching brief at a National Trust property at 40 Church Lane, West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, following the chance discovery of part of a human skull and other bone fragments during building work on the foundations of the cottage (NGR: SU 8301 9574; Fig 1). Human bone had been discovered on previous occasions during building work in the lane, and it was commonly believed that there was a Roman or medieval cemetery on the site, or possibly a plague pit.

The building work was being carried out to prevent the reoccurrence of rising damp, caused by the accumulation of soil against the north wall of the cottage, and entailed the excavation of a c 1m wide trench and revetment wall around the north side of the building. It was during the excavation of this trench that the builders found the human remains.

Following the notification of the relevant authorities and a visit to the site by a police forensic team, Gary Marshall, National Trust archaeologist for the Thames and Solent Region, contacted Northamptonshire Archaeology and commissioned an archaeological investigation of the area to the north of the cottage and a watching brief during the excavation of a foundation trench for a new garden wall at the front of the property.

The principal aim of the project was to identify the graves in the builder's trench and remove the overburden to expose the remains of the graves so that the human remains could be excavated and dated, either from artefactual evidence or, in the absence of grave goods, from obtaining a radiocarbon date from the bone. The subsidiary aim was to

determine the date, sequence, extent and state of preservation of any other archaeological features or deposits within the area impacted by the building works. The methodology for the project was set out in a method statement prepared by NA (2010).

This report, which presents the results of the excavation and watching brief, has been prepared in accordance with Appendix 4 of the English Heritage procedural document *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH 1991), relevant sections of *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2006), and appropriate national standards and guidelines, as recommended by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). On completion, the project archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum and, in accordance with the terms of the burials licence, the human remains will be reinterred in the cemetery of St Lawrence's Church, West Wycombe.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The excavation site, which covered an area of c 15m², was situated adjacent and to the north of 40 Church Lane, West Wycombe, c 65m to the north of High Street (A40). Prior to building works commencing, the area was covered with a broad concrete path leading from the street to the rear of the property and it was separated from the neighbouring cottage by a wooden fence.

Topographically, the site lies on a steep south-facing slope overlooking the valley of the River Wye, at c 96m aOD. The underlying bedrock belongs to the late Cretaceous White Chalk Subgroup (BGS 1996).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

Lying on a natural route through the Chiltern Hills, the area around West Wycombe has attracted settlement and activity since the prehistoric period and reference to the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record (HER) has identified a number of archaeological sites and findspots nearby (HER numbers in brackets; Fig 1). Evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement in the area is scarce, but worked flints and Bronze Age metalwork have been found by fieldwalkers and metal detectorists in the fields around the village (0120501000 and 0551000000). In the Iron Age a multivallate hill fort, enclosing c 1.1ha, was constructed on top of West Wycombe Hill and on the southern and northern slopes of the hill there are traces of Iron Age and Romano-British field systems (0596800000 and 0803200000). Metal detectorists have recovered c 30 late Iron Age coins from a field to the west of the hillfort and other coins and metalwork from adjoining fields, leading Farley (1995) to suggest that the hillfort may have been an important centre for trade or ritual activity in the area.

In the Roman period there may have been a road passing down the Wye Valley from near the villa at The Rye, High Wycombe (0038000000) towards the Icknield Way to the west, although this has not been proven archaeologically. However, the likelihood of there having been a Roman road nearby is supported by the discovery in the 1970s of a Roman cemetery immediately to the east of the village (0435000000; Farley and Wright 1979). This contained the remains of at least thirteen individuals, three of which had been buried in timber coffins, and their alignment suggested that they had been buried in a small cemetery by the side of a road. Initially radiocarbon dated to the 2nd

century AD, subsequent recalibration dated the cemetery to the 4th century AD. Human remains are also reputed to have been found during the construction of St Paul's church in the 1840s, with accounts claiming that a number of skeletons dating to the Roman period had been found in a number of randomly excavated graves and that they may have been the victims of a 'sanguinary encounter' (0061700000).

The Roman burials excavated in Church Lane lie c 100m to the west of the reported burials at St Paul's. Previously, skeletons had been discovered during building work beneath the floor of 41 Church Lane (at the time it was believed to be the body of an Italian gambler who'd gone missing several years previously!), under the front steps of number 40 and at Hill House (Hickman 1999). Until the current investigation, the date of the burials was uncertain and speculation varied between them being the remains of victims of The Black Death or The Plague and the hastily buried remains of executed footpads.

There is no certain evidence for Roman settlement in West Wycombe, although there are unconfirmed claims that there may be a villa beneath 'The Dormers', the house that stands on the site of the old manor house (446402000). Recent dredging of the lake in West Wycombe Park led to the discovery of 237 Roman coins and five brooches (0577500000; Marshall 2008).

The village of West Wycombe, which was purchased by the National Trust in 1929, contains many fine buildings, dating from the 16th to 19th centuries. Amongst these are the cottages in Church Lane, including number 40. The original cottage, now 40 and 41 Church Lane, was built in the 17th century as a single one-and-a-half storey timber-framed dwelling of four bays (National Trust building survey report, undated). It did not extend as far to the north as the modern building; the original north gable wall of the cottage is now the partition wall between the two properties. In the early 18th century the front and gable walls were cased in brick and in the mid 18th century (prior to 1767) the cottage was divided into two separate dwellings, with a single-bay brick extension being added on the northern side. In the late 18th century a single-storey lean-to was added to the rear of the south cottage; this was raised in height to one-and-a-half storeys in the early 19th century. Further extensions were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th century, including the lean-to against the north gable wall that would have probably disturbed the Roman burials investigated by the current project. The latest extension was a bathroom, built in the mid 20th century on the north-west corner of the north cottage.

3 METHODOLOGY

Prior to archaeological works commencing, an application was made to the Ministry of Justice for a licence for the removal of human remains and the Environmental Health Officer for the Wycombe District, Andrew Collinson, was notified about the removal of the burials.

Once on site, the excavation area was cleaned, prepared and planned at a scale of 1:20, using hand tapes and a baseline related to the OS National Grid (Figs 2 and 3). A section drawing of the full length of the builder's trench was drawn at a scale of 1:10 and related to the OS Datum. Other section drawings were drawn, at a scale of 1:10, as required.

The overburden was removed by hand down to the uppermost archaeological horizon. Due to the limited working space, no spoil could be stacked on site so excavated soil was placed directly into the back of a truck and removed from the site. All spoil was scanned with a metal detector prior to removal.

Once the extent of the graves had been determined, the site was screened off from the public using black tarpaulins and wooden boards. The individual graves were excavated to expose the skeletal remains and they were planned at a scale of 1:10, photographed and recorded. The skeletons were lifted and placed in labelled bags and stored in cardboard finds boxes.

The standard NA single context recording system was employed throughout for the compilation of the site records. The photographic record comprised black and white negative and colour transparency film, supplemented with digital images.

The excavation and watching brief were undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (1985, revised 2010), *Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation* (1994, revised 2008b) and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (1994, revised 2008a). In addition, it also followed the guidelines outlined in the document *Guidelines to the standards for recording human remains* (Brickley and McKinley 2004).

All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council's Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines. The project was monitored by Gary Marshall, the National Trust's Archaeologist for the Thames and Solent Region.

4 EXCAVATION RESULTS

4.1 Roman burials

To the north of the cottage and cut into the chalk bedrock was a row of four graves, arranged side-by-side on an east to west alignment (Figs 3 and 4). The individual graves were aligned north-north-west to south-south-east and were spaced c 0.3m apart, although the easternmost grave was cut by the grave immediately to its west. The burials had been interred with their heads to the north; the cutting of the builder's revetment trench and the foundation trench for the north wall of the cottage had truncated the lower halves of the burials, generally from the waist downwards.

With the exception of two iron nails, which had been buried with the backfill, there were no funerary goods so a radiocarbon date was obtained from one of the burials, burial 12. This provided a date between the mid 3rd and early 5th century AD (240-420 cal AD, 98% confidence, 1710+/-40 BP, Beta-285988). The graves were backfilled with light brown clayey silt, with frequent fine to coarse chalk pebbles, the high chalk content indicating that this is excavated material from the cutting of the graves.

Burial 9

At the western end of the builder's trench, by the north-west corner of the cottage, was the grave, 10, of a young female (Figs 4 and 5). In the row of graves, this grave was slightly offset to the north, by c 0.4m.

The burial, 9, was extended and supine (lying on its back), and the grave, which had near vertical sides and a flat base, had a surviving length of c 1.3m, width of 0.55m and depth of 0.29m. The skull and upper thorax had been truncated by a modern fencepost, 31, and most of the left leg had been removed by the builder's trench. The upper part of the fill of the grave had been disturbed by a modern pipe trench, 24.

Burial 12

Grave 13, which lay 0.27m to the east of grave 10, contained the remains of an older individual, probably a male, buried in an extended, prone (face-down) position (Figs 3, 4 and 6). The lower half of the body, from the waist downwards, and the lower arms, from the elbows downwards, had been removed by the builder's trench. The skull was angled to the east and had heavily worn or missing dentition, with half of the teeth having been lost some time prior to death, with bone growth over the cavities left by the missing teeth; one of the surviving teeth displayed a small abscess.

The grave, only the northern half of which survived, was a narrow, sub-rectangular cut with vertical sides and a slightly concave base. It had a surviving length of 0.6m, and was 0.42m wide and 0.42m deep.

Burial 15

Burial 15, that of an older individual of indeterminate sex, had been heavily truncated and only the skull, thoracic region and parts of the upper arm survived intact (Figs 3, 4 and 7). The body had been placed in an extended, supine position, and although the arms were largely missing, the position of the hand bones indicated that the right arm had been folded so that the hand lay over the left shoulder and the lower left arm had rested on the abdomen. The individual had worn and decayed teeth, several of which had been lost ante-mortem, and they may have suffered from osteoporosis.

The grave, 16, of burial 15 had surviving measurements of c 0.9m long by 0.56m wide by 0.34m deep, and its eastern edge cut into the backfill of grave 28. A fragment of an iron nail was recovered from the backfill, 14.

Burial 26

At the eastern end of the row (as excavated) was grave 28, which contained the remains of a young adult male (Figs 3 and 8). The burial, 26, had been placed in an extended, prone position, with the face angled to the west and the arms resting by the side of the body; the legs and hands had been removed by feature 21 and the builder's trench.

The grave, the western edge of which was truncated by grave 16, was larger than the other three graves and measured c 1.05m long by 0.82m wide by 0.44m deep. An iron nail was recovered from the backfill, 27.

Feature 21, possible grave

This feature was almost entirely truncated by the builder's trench and the north wall of the cottage; all that remained was part of the base and remnants of its northern edge (Figs 3 and 4). The feature cut the southern end of grave 28 and was cut by grave 16, indicating that it dates to the later Roman period. As far as it was possible to determine, its apparent sub-rectangular shape was not dissimilar to grave 28 and it is possible that it may have been a further grave, although this could not be confirmed.

The feature was at least 0.7m long, up to 1.4m wide and 0.57m deep, and was filled with light greyish-brown clayey silt, 20, with frequent fine to coarse chalk pebbles and several flint nodules.

The radiocarbon determination

A length of rib from burial 12 was submitted for radiocarbon dating by Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) (Table 1). This has dated the burial to the late Roman period, the mid 3rd to early 5th centuries AD.

Table 1: The radiocarbon determination

Laboratory and sample number	Context	Sample details	C13/C12 N15/N14	Conventional radiocarbon Age BP	Cal AD intercept 68% confidence 95% confidence
Beta-285988 WWY/B3	Burial 12	Human bone (rib)	-20.1 +9.2	1710+/-40	340 260-300 & 310-390 240-420

Laboratory: Beta Analytic, Miami, Florida, USA

Calibration: INTCAL04 Radiocarbon Age Calibration

4.2 Late 15th/16th-century ditch pits and pits

On the east side of the cottage there was a ditch, 19, that had largely been truncated by the excavation of the builder's revetment trench (Fig 3). It was fragments of human skull recovered from this ditch that had first alerted the builders to the presence of human remains on the site. The ditch had a V-shaped profile with steep sides and a narrow concave base, was aligned north to south and measured c 1.0m wide by 0.54m deep (Fig 4). It extended underneath the cottage to the south and into the neighbouring property to the north, and ran parallel with Church Lane. It was filled with mid greyish-brown slightly clayey silt, 17, with frequent sub-angular chalk pebbles and contained the fragmented, disarticulated remains of at least two human skeletons, 18. Sherds of Roman and late medieval pottery recovered from the ditch suggest that it dates to the late 15th century or slightly later.

At the front of the property and extending from the north-east corner of the cottage the builders dug a foundation trench, under archaeological supervision, for a new front wall. The foundation trench was excavated down to the chalk bedrock, to a depth of up to 0.6m below the existing ground surface. Within the foundation trench and cut into the chalk were two sub-rectangular pits, 4 and 6, spaced 0.31m apart, which had very steep, in places vertical sides and flat bases (Figs 3 and 9). Pit 4 measured approximately 0.58m long by 0.42m wide by 0.46m deep and pit 6 was slightly larger. Both pits were filled with light brown silty clay with frequent chalk pebbles and occasional flint nodules and they appear to have been backfilled shortly after they were dug. Pit 4 contained a sherd of 'Tudor Green' pottery, suggesting that they probably date to the late 15th or early 16th century and are broadly contemporary with ditch 19.

4.3 Modern features and deposits

Overlying the Roman and late medieval features was a layer of subsoil that comprised mid greyish-brown slightly clayey silt, 2, containing flint pebbles, chalk flecks and tile fragments. This deposit was up to 0.2m thick where it had accumulated against the wall of the cottage, thinning to 0.1m thick at the boundary with the adjacent property to the north. The hand-made tile fragments could only be broadly dated to the Roman to post-medieval period (Pat Chapman, pers comm).

Overlying the subsoil was a layer of garden soil, 1, that was approximately 0.3m thick. This was dry, friable mid brownish-grey organic silt and it contained brick and tile fragments, nodules of flint, animal bone, sherds of 18th- and 19th-century pottery and fragments of bottle glass. Part of a rowel-spur, possibly dating to the medieval period, was also recovered from this layer.

Cut into the top of the garden soil at the boundary between the two properties were two postholes, spaced c 2m apart, that are all that remains of a modern timber fence (Fig 3). The postholes, 31 and 35, had a diameter of c 0.6m and a depth of 0.6m and they still held the rotted remains of timber posts. Posthole 31 had truncated the skull and shoulders of Burial 9; part of the skull was recovered from the backfill. A third posthole, 33, possibly part of an earlier fence, lay 0.5m to the west of posthole 35.

Prior to the building works and its removal by the builders, the garden soil had been covered with a layer of concrete, 25, that had formed a wide path on the north side of the cottage, providing access to the garden and rear door of the building. The concrete was c 0.12m thick and had a weathered surface, suggesting that it had been put down in the mid 20th century, if not earlier.

5 HUMAN BONE by Sarah Inskip

Introduction and archaeological background

The partial remains of four well-preserved, but truncated, Roman burials were excavated. Some disarticulated material was also recovered. There were no grave goods, only two iron nails found in the backfill of two of the burials. All of the graves were aligned north-north-west to south-south-east, with the heads placed at the northern end of the graves. An article published in the parish paper suggests at least three more burials have been discovered in the lane in the past (Hickman 1999).

Aims and objectives

The aim of this report is to describe in detail the human remains from West Wycombe. This includes both the macroscopic analysis of the individuals as well as the burial rites accorded to them. Due to the limited sample size, it is not possible to comment on the demography and overall health of the population.

Osteological methodology

Preservation and completeness

Preservation was scored according to the amount of cortical bone available for macroscopic analysis (see Table 2). For comparability, equivalent Behrensmeyer (1978) scores are provided. Overall skeletal completeness was scored following the ranges: >75%, 75 – 50%, <50% - 25% and <25%.

Table 2: Skeletal preservation categories

Preservation	% cortical surfaces remaining	Behrensmeyer (1978) weathering scale
Excellent	≥ 95%	Stage 0
Good	60 – 94%	Stage 1
Fair	<60	Stages 2 – 3
Poor	≤25%	Stages 4 – 5

Ageing

There are three main processes that affect the skeletal system during life that allow the determination of age from osteological remains. The first is the growth and development of the skeleton. Methods based on this include epiphyseal fusion and dental development. These methods are used on immature remains and young adults. Once skeletal maturity is reached, methods examine remodelling and degeneration of bone. Accordingly, age can be estimated from the skeleton using a number of methods which are chosen depending on the age of the individual. No immature individuals were identified in the articulated remains. The burials were aged through examination of the pubic symphysis and the auricular surface. These are immobile joints that do not deteriorate with activity and therefore reflect age related degeneration. These methods are as outlined in Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) and Brickley and McKinley (2004). As Brothwell suggests that diet changed very little from the Neolithic to the early medieval period, and it is not possible to calibrate a wear pattern specific to these individuals, Brothwell's (1981) dental ageing method was used to indicate age from the dentition.

Sexing

The human skeleton is sexually dimorphic (Mays 2010, 40). Male and female differences are the result of child bearing in women and greater production of testosterone in men. The two regions that demonstrate greatest sexual dimorphism between human males and females are the pelvis (os coxae) and skull and, as such, fragments of skull and pelvis will be examined. Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994) identify five regions of the skull and four on the pelvis, which demonstrate variation between males and females. The preauricular salcus has been demonstrated to be related to size rather than sex (Mays and Cox 2000) and was not included in this study. These regions will be assessed in order to estimate sex in the West Wycombe material. Attention will also be paid to the overall size and robusticity of the remains.

Pathology

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common joint pathology seen in archaeological skeletons (Mays 2010:186). Degeneration of the articular cartilage in synovial joints results in changes to the underlying bone surface. Although consensus is not unanimous regarding the diagnosis of osteoarthritis, to avoid over estimation of the disease, Rogers and Waldron (1995) have suggested that more than one indicator of the disease needs to be present on a joint surface before it can be diagnosed as such. These indicators include sclerosis, new bone growth on, or around the joint surface and pitting. The only indicator which is pathognomonic of the disease is eburnation, where the bones of an articulating joint are in direct contact with each other creating a polished 'ivory' like surface. As such, where possible, evidence for osteoarthritis will be sought following these guidelines.

The degeneration of the fibrocartiliginous intervertebral discs causes the development of osteophytes around the margin of the vertebral body. Severity can range from small intermittent osteophytes to large osteophytes that connect vertebra together. Osteophytosis was scored following the method of Säger (1969) (cited in Brothwell 1981, 151) where 4 grades are identified: grade 0 = none, grade 1 = intermittent osteophytes on less than half of vertebral margin, grade 2 = continuous osteophytes around vertebral margin and grade 3 = large extensive osteophytes.

Cribra orbitalia

Cribra orbitalia is thought to represent iron deficiency in the body during childhood. Deficiency in the body can be caused by a number of problems. Dietary deficiency has been identified as a key causative factor in the development of the condition but metabolic diseases, parasites and general ill health can produce cribra orbitalia. Visible

skeletal changes include the expansion of the diploic space (marrow producing area) and thinning of the outer table of the skull (Lewis 2000, 45). The morphological changes result in a characteristic pitting in the orbital roof of the skull. Normally being a childhood condition, cribra orbitalia can show evidence of healing in older individuals whereby the pits become rounded and eventually close. Lesions were scored following recommendations in Brickley and McKinley (2004).

Schmorl's nodes

Schmorl's nodes occur when the intervertebral disc herniates and places pressure on the adjacent vertebral body. This is visible osteoarchaeologically as cortically lined depressions on the vertebral body surface. They do not usually penetrate deep into the vertebral body but their shape can be highly varied. The location of Schmorl's nodes was recorded and whether the superior or inferior surface was affected.

Dental pathology

Caries, abscesses, antemortem tooth loss, hypoplasia and calculus were scored following the procedures set out in the standards of Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994).

Metrics

Metric analysis of bone can tell much about an individual and their derivative population (reference). Unfortunately not enough burials were uncovered at West Wycombe to undertake statistically viable comparisons. However, as the remains seem to form part of a larger cemetery, measurements were made to enable future analysis should more remains come to light.

All complete long bones were measured to the nearest 0.1mm using sliding electronic digital callipers. Diameters were collected using a measuring tape to the nearest 0.1mm. For future comparison purposes, measurements were taken following the standards of Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994).

Trotter and Gleser (1952, 1958) produced regression equations for calculating stature from data obtained from known height individuals. Equations were produced for American whites and blacks for males and females. Stature estimates were carried out using the appropriate equations for the sex of the individual. Due to the incompleteness of the skeletons, different elements were used to calculate stature.

The skulls were all fragmented and as such no cranial measurements were taken.

Non-Metrics

The small sample size prevented the use of non-metrics to assess the degree of relatedness between the burials. In similarity to the metric data, non-metric traits were recorded in case future material is revealed. Cranial non-metric traits were recorded following Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). Due to the lack of post-cranial traits in the standards, the author composed a list of other commonly observed post-cranial non-metric traits based on Finnegan (1978).

Results

Burial 9

Preservation: Good

Completeness: 50 – 75%

Age: Young

Sex: Female

Stature: 1.601m (max right femur)

Pathologies: No osteoarthritis was observable on any joint surfaces. Schmorl's nodes were identified on all vertebrae from T6 – L5. Thoracic vertebrae were affected on both the inferior and superior surfaces. L2 - L5 were affected on the superior surface only where as L1 showed a depression in the inferior surface only. The orbits of the skull were not observable.

Dental: There was no surviving dentition for burial 9.

Individual 9 had no evidence for inflammatory response, infection or trauma.

Burial 12

Preservation: Good

Completeness: 25 - 50%

Age: Old

Sex: ?Male

Stature: 1.629m (max right humerus)

Pathologies: Extensive osteoarthritis in the cervical vertebrae (eburnation present on apophyseal facets) grade 2 – 3 osteophytosis on the cervical bodies was present. Costovertebral osteoarthritis was evidenced by new bone growth around the joint margin with pitting and sclerosis on the ribs and thoracic vertebrae. Osteoarthritis was observed on left and right glenoid fossae with eburnation in the left glenoid (corresponding humeral head fragmented). There was no osteoarthritis in the temporal mandibular joint or in the right elbow. All other joints were unobservable due to truncation or fragmentation.

Cribra orbitalia was scored as grade 1 but was healing.

Dental: This individual has substantial ante-mortem tooth loss (AMTL) with at least 12 teeth out of 24 observable tooth positions being lost prior to death. The upper incisors are missing, but it is uncertain as to whether this is post-mortem or ante-mortem due to the damage to the anterior portion of the maxilla. The remaining teeth have heavy wear with all lower incisors worn down to the tooth cervix. No caries were evident in the remaining teeth. An abscess was observed on the lower right buccal surface of lower premolar 1. New bone growth was observed on the posterior surface of the maxillae. Woven bone and remodelled lamellar bone was present possibly representing a long term infection relating to the AMTL of upper molars.

Individual 12 had no evidence for inflammatory response, infection or trauma.

Burial 15

Preservation: Good

Completeness: 50 – 75%

Age: Old

Sex: ?

Stature: 1.669m (max left ulna)

Pathologies: There were osteoarthritic changes in the spine of individual 16, however none of these were severe enough to satisfy the criteria of Rogers and Waldron (1995). Schmorl's nodes were present on 2 of the 20 observable vertebrae (thoracics 9 and 12). Bilateral cribra orbitalia was observed in the orbits. This was scored as grade 2 and activity score 2 (healing).

The density of trabecular bone in the vertebral bodies and thinning of cortical bone and widening of the medullary cavities in long bones suggests the individual may be

suffering from osteoporosis. This is unsurprising considering the advanced age of the individual.

Dental: Abscess and remodelled new bone growth is probably related to the loss of upper molars. All molars except right upper molar 3 have been lost antemortem. Caries were present on upper right molar 3, left upper 1st premolar, left and right lower premolar 2 and left upper incisor 2. Grade 1 calculus was present on the lower second incisors on the labial surfaces. A single hypoplastic band was visible on the canines. Measurement of the distance of the hypoplastic bands from the cemento-enamel junction was not possible due to the extensive remodelling of the associated alveolar bone.

Individual 15 had no evidence for inflammatory response, infection or trauma.

Burial 26

Preservation: Good

Completeness: 50 – 75%

Age: Young

Sex: Male

Stature: 1.787m (max right humerus)

Pathologies: There was no evidence of osteoarthritis in any of the observable joints except for pitting and scleritis on the right superior apophyseal facet of S1. A cranial shift has occurred at the lumbosacral border. The first sacral vertebra is partially lumbarised and a fibrous attachment site remains on the right sacral ala (now S2) which fits the transverse process of S1. This asymmetrical lumbarisation is possibly the cause of the osteoarthritis seen on S1. Grade 1 cribra orbitalia, which was healing is visible in the orbits.

Dental: Caries were present on the upper right 2nd premolar on the distal interproximal surface and the corresponding mesial surface of upper right molar 1. Grade 1 calculus was present on the buccal surfaces of all of the mandibular teeth and the upper left 1st molar to the upper 2nd right premolar.

Individual 26 had no evidence for inflammatory response, infection or trauma.

Disarticulated material

A small quantity of disarticulated material was recovered from a late medieval ditch and probably represents remains from disturbed graves. The minimum number of individuals suggested from the remains was 2 from the left mandible, 2 lower left first molars and the presence of 2 right femurs. The remains included a virtually complete skull of a late adolescent (molar 3 erupting with molar 2 in occlusion). A number of other bones fitted with this age range including an unfused proximal humerus, cervical vertebrae with unfused epiphyseal rings and a fusing right glenoid fossa. It is possible that most of the remains belong to this individual, but the presence of other adult material means this will remain uncertain.

Discussion

Roman ideas of pollution and the dead resulted with most Roman burials taking place outside of the settlement area (Hope 1999). To date, there are no structures associated with the burials at Church Lane. The site of a possible Roman villa has been posited just south of Church Lane (ADS Record ID - NTSMR-MNA130954). It is possible that the burials are related to the villa but this can not be verified based on current archaeological evidence.

There are a number of similarities between the inhumations at Church Lane and those found at High Wycombe (Portway Drive) and Sands. None of the burials contained any grave goods and they were all located close to the route of a possible Roman road. The cemeteries contained males and females of all ages as well as some juvenile (but not infant remains). Probably the earliest are the burials at Church Lane, which may date to as early as the mid 3rd century AD, followed by those found at Sands and Portway Drive that date to the 4th century AD.

With such a small sample size, it is difficult to comment on the trends seen in the four articulated individuals from Church Lane and how these compare to Portway Drive and Sands. Regardless, there was nothing unusual in any of the burials at Church Lane that would not be expected from a Roman cemetery of this period (see Roberts and Cox 2000). Comparison of the skeletons from West Wycombe with the burials excavated at Sands shows normal, but expected similarity. Both sites contained adult males and females with evidence of juvenile remains. Osteoarthritis was also identified in two individuals at Sands, as at Church Lane.

One of the most interesting things about the Church Lane skeletons, and indeed Roman burial as a whole, is that there is such a wide range of burial types and locations (Cleary 2000). At Church Lane, two of the burials were prone (face-down) and two were supine (lying on their backs). Prone burials are relatively common in the Roman period, occurring as isolated individual graves as well as in organised cemeteries. A systematic study of prone burials has shown that although they are rarer than supine extended and crouched burials (Philpott 1991, 72), they can sometimes make up a substantial percentage of burials within a cemetery, eg 12% at Kempston (Boylston *et al* 2000) and 8.8% at Cirencester (Philpott 1991); prone burials become increasingly more common in the 4th century AD.

Boylston *et al* (2000) suggests that prone burials are a way of marking out people as different to the rest of the population. Philpott (1991) summarises that prone burials may have been used for criminals or to prevent the dead from walking. It is difficult to assume that the burials at Church Lane represent deviants in some way, particularly as they appear to have been buried in the same way as the supine burials, just facing downwards. There is no evidence for binding or decapitation. It is however interesting to note that the two other local inhumation cemeteries contained no prone burials.

Burial orientation varies in the Roman period. It has been suggested that east to west inhumations may represent Christian graves and north to south, pagan (Philpott 1991). The burial orientation at the three inhumation cemeteries at West Wycombe and High Wycombe were individually uniform but varied between sites. The burials at Church Lane were north-north-west to south-south-east, while at Sands they were north-west to south-east and at Portway they were east-west. Without secure dating, it is not possible to speculate whether the variation in burial orientation is related to the conversion to Christianity or not. Further to this, Hope (1999, 60) suggests that the evidence we would need to suggest this is not forthcoming from the graves and that actually there might have been no distinction in how pagans and Christians were buried.

A second possible explanation is provided by Farley and Wright (1978), with the relationship between Roman burials and roads. The north-west to south-east orientation of the Sands burials is explained by their location next to a possible Roman road running between High Wycombe and West Wycombe. They derive this argument from the analysis of differently orientated burials at Lynch Farm where graves were orientated east to west or north to south, depending on where they were situated in relation to a particular field (Farley and Wright 1978, 87). It is thought that the Roman

road running from High Wycombe to West Wycombe turns north to meet Icknield Way after High Wycombe (Chiltern Archaeology 2010). If this theory is correct, the burials at West Wycombe could be parallel to the road as it turns towards the Oxford area and as such are orientated north-north-west to south-south-east. This idea is further reinforced by the fact that the burials at Portway Drive are east to west, which would also be parallel to the road.

6 FINDS

6.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised four sherds with a total weight of 18g. It consisted of a mixture of medieval and Roman material. The former was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (eg Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat *et al* 1994), as follows:

MS9: *Brill/Boarstall Ware*. 1200-?1600. 1 sherd, 6g

TLMS17: *Tudor Green type*. 15th to early 17th century. 1 sherd, 5g

The Romano-British pottery was recorded using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit Roman type-series (Marney 1989)

Fabric 28, *local greyware*, 2nd-4th century. 2 sherds, 7g

The sherd of 'Tudor Green' pottery occurred in context 3, the fill of pit 4, the sherd of Brill in context 17, the fill of ditch 18. The latter context also produced the two Romano-British sherds. The Brill sherd is in a late medieval fabric, which suggests that both the pottery-producing contexts are of 15th- to early 16th-century date.

6.2 Metal objects by Tora Hylton

Three iron objects were recovered during the excavations, two from soil deposits associated with Roman graves (SF 2 and 3) and one from garden soil (SF 1). The finds recovered from grave earth associated with Burials 3 and 4, which are encrusted in chalk rich corrosion deposits, are represented by complete and incomplete nail fragments; these were probably introduced during the backfilling of the graves. Part of a nail shank from a hand forged nail was recovered from Burial 3 and a Manning Type 1b nail measuring c 80mm in length was recovered from Burial 4 (1985, fig 32).

Part of a rowel-spur was recovered from garden soil (1); the terminals of the sides (arms), the rowel and most of the rowel-box is missing. The sides of the spur are slender with a D-shaped cross-section and they curve down towards the wearer's ankle. The neck faces downward, has an oval cross-section and the rowel box is not complete. Without the terminals or the entire rowel and box it is difficult to date accurately, but stylistically this spur may be of late medieval /early post-medieval date.

Finds catalogue

SF 1, context 1, garden soil. Rowel spur, iron. Incomplete, terminals from both sides (arms) and rowel missing, encrusted in corrosion products. Slender sides with D-shaped cross-section, sides curve down towards the wearer's ankle. Short downward

facing neck with oval cross-section and vestige of the rowel box. Length (incomplete) c 75mm; length of neck 5mm; length of rowel box 20mm.

SF 2, context 14, fill of grave 16. Rod fragment, iron. Incomplete, one terminal missing and covered in corrosion deposits. A fresh break at one end reveals the rod has a square-shaped cross-section, perhaps suggesting that it is part of a shank from a hand forged nail. Surviving length 27mm.

SF 3, context 27, fill of grave 28. Nail, iron. Covered in corrosion deposits, flat with sub-circular head and square-sectioned shank. Resembles a Manning type 1b (1985, fig 32). Length c 80mm.

7 DISCUSSION

The Roman burials

After many years of speculation, the excavation at 40 Church Lane, West Wycombe has confirmed that the human remains unearthed in the lane over the past decades (Hickman 1999) date to the Roman period and that Church Lane is the site of a Roman cemetery. A row of four graves were investigated by the current excavation and other human remains from a late medieval/early post-medieval ditch suggest that other graves have been disturbed in the past.

The extent of the cemetery remains unknown, but it is likely to have been a small cemetery, possibly by the side of a local road or track, serving a small rural community centred on a nearby villa or other small settlement. There is currently very little evidence for a villa in this reach of the Wye Valley, although circumstantial evidence for Roman settlement in the area has been found in recent years in Wycombe Park (Marshall 2008) and there are unproven claims that a Roman building, possibly a villa, lies beneath 'The Dormers', the house that stands on the site of the old manor (Harman 1934, 13).

The arrangement of the graves in the small part of the cemetery available for investigation appears to indicate that the graves were laid out in a row and the fairly regular spacing of the burials suggests that the graves were marked in some way. However, further graves over a wider area would have to be investigated to determine if it was a 'managed' cemetery, of the type described by Thomas (1981), or whether the four graves are perhaps a kin grouping and form a cluster in a cemetery with a less regular layout, a character that is more typical of rural Roman cemeteries. Despite their relative proximity, the haphazard character of the alleged Roman graves at St Paul's suggests that there are two distinct burial grounds in West Wycombe, not including the cemetery investigated by Farley and Wright (1979) to the west of the town. Future archaeological investigation of groundworks in Church Lane could add considerably to our understanding of the Roman cemetery and its relationship with Roman settlement and activity in the area.

The alignment of the graves, from north-north-west to south-south-east, may have been dictated by a pre-existing boundary, such as a track or field boundary, or by religious custom. The possible identification of pagan or Christian burials from grave alignment has been widely discussed and is fairly inconclusive, particularly in relation to small rural cemeteries. There were no grave goods accompanying the burials and there was no evidence for wooden coffins or any form of grave lining; the two nails

recovered from two of the graves were probably shovelled into the graves with the backfill. It is likely that the individuals were buried in shrouds.

The possibility of there having been a Roman road in the Wye valley at West Wycombe has been forwarded by Head (1974), although as he admits, there is no archaeological evidence for this and the claim is largely based on circumstantial evidence and the writings of a local historian (Harman 1934). However, such a natural route through the Chilterns at this point, and the presence of a hill fort, suggests that there may have been a long-established track down the Wye valley in the Roman period, with sidetracks branching off to higher ground on the valley slopes. It is therefore not inconceivable that the Roman cemetery at Church Lane was positioned by the side of a small track leading up towards the top of Wycombe Hill.

The radiocarbon date obtained from one of the burials dates the cemetery to the mid 3rd to early 5th century (240-420 cal AD, 98% confidence, 1710+/-40 BP, Beta-285988), which is the expected date range for a Roman inhumation cemetery. Prior to this, cremation of the body and burial of the cremated bone, often with grave goods, was the preferred burial rite. This trend towards inhumation was prevalent over much of the Roman Empire, probably beginning in Rome in the 2nd century AD and then radiating out across the provinces, to become the principal burial rite by the mid 3rd century. This transition has been linked to the spread of Christianity, and to a certain extent this may be the case, but as Petts (2003) has suggested, it is more likely to have been linked to the increasing social and political power and influence of the Church after the Edict of Milan in AD313 than to the requirements of any particular religious practice. Indeed, contemporary Christian religious texts make little mention of burial rites and it is likely that, at least initially, Christians adopted the same burial rites as pagans; it is only later in the 4th century that there appears to have been an increasing Christianization of burial practices, evident at the larger urban 'managed', cemeteries such as Poundbury, Dorset and Ashton, Northamptonshire.

15th-/early 16th-century features and later deposits

The late medieval/early post-medieval ditch is probably a drainage ditch that was cut along the western side of Church Lane. The cutting of this ditch disturbed at least two Roman graves and the disinterred bones eventually found their way into the ditch, along with two abraded sherds of Roman greyware and a sherd of 15th-/early 16th-century Brill/Boarstall ware. At this time the area to the west of this stretch of Church Lane was probably fields, with development to the north of High Street coming later, in the 17th century. The two pits by the side of the road date to the same period; the purpose of these pits is unknown, but they appear to have been backfilled shortly after they were excavated.

Following the building of the cottages in Church Lane in the 17th century (National Trust, building survey report), and the subsequent additions over the next three hundred years, a layer of dark garden soil gradually accumulated to the north of the cottages. This overlay a layer of mineralised soil (subsoil) that sealed the Roman graves. In the late 19th/early 20th century a single-storey extension was built on the north side of the cottage, the foundation trench for which probably truncated the southern ends of the Roman graves and may have entirely destroyed a fifth grave, only a small part of which survived in the builder's trench excavated for the current remedial building works. The insertion of a water pipe and the erection of a timber fence also caused damage to the Roman burials, with fragments of human skull being found in the packing of one of the fence postholes.

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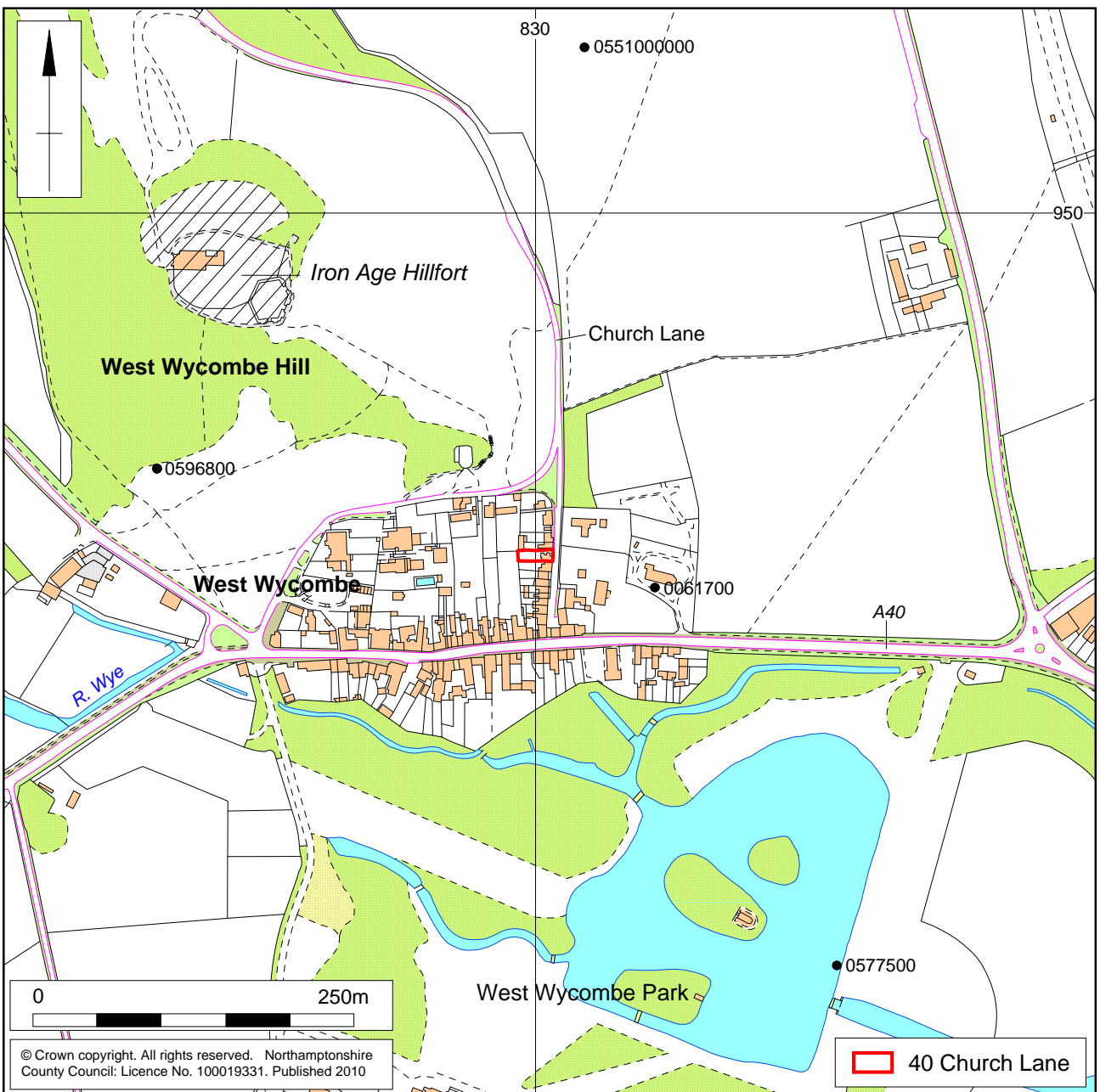
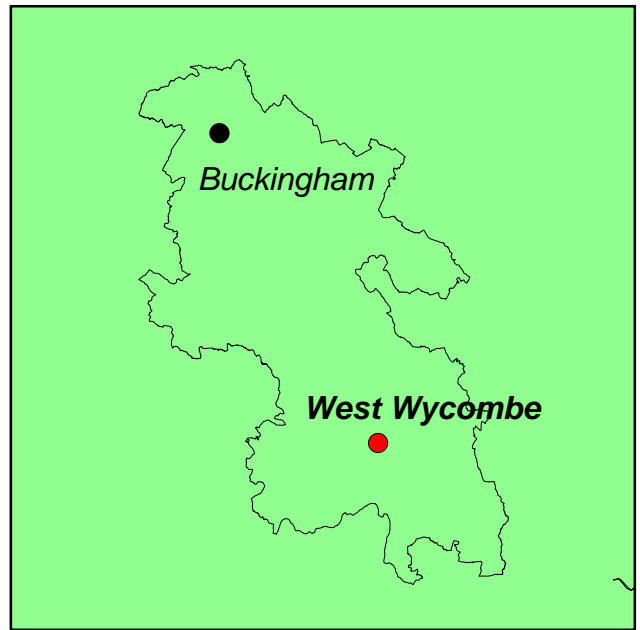
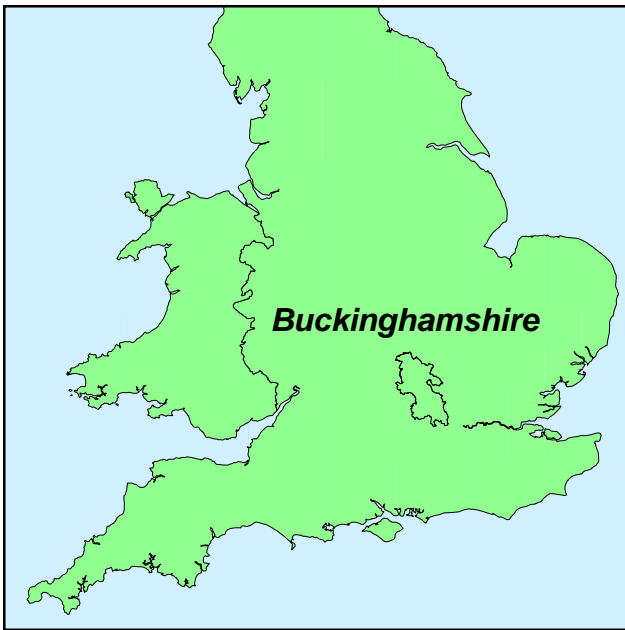
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APPENDIX : Summary of contexts and features**Abbreviations**

P pottery; T tile; G glass; CP clay pipe; sf small find (details in **Comments** column)

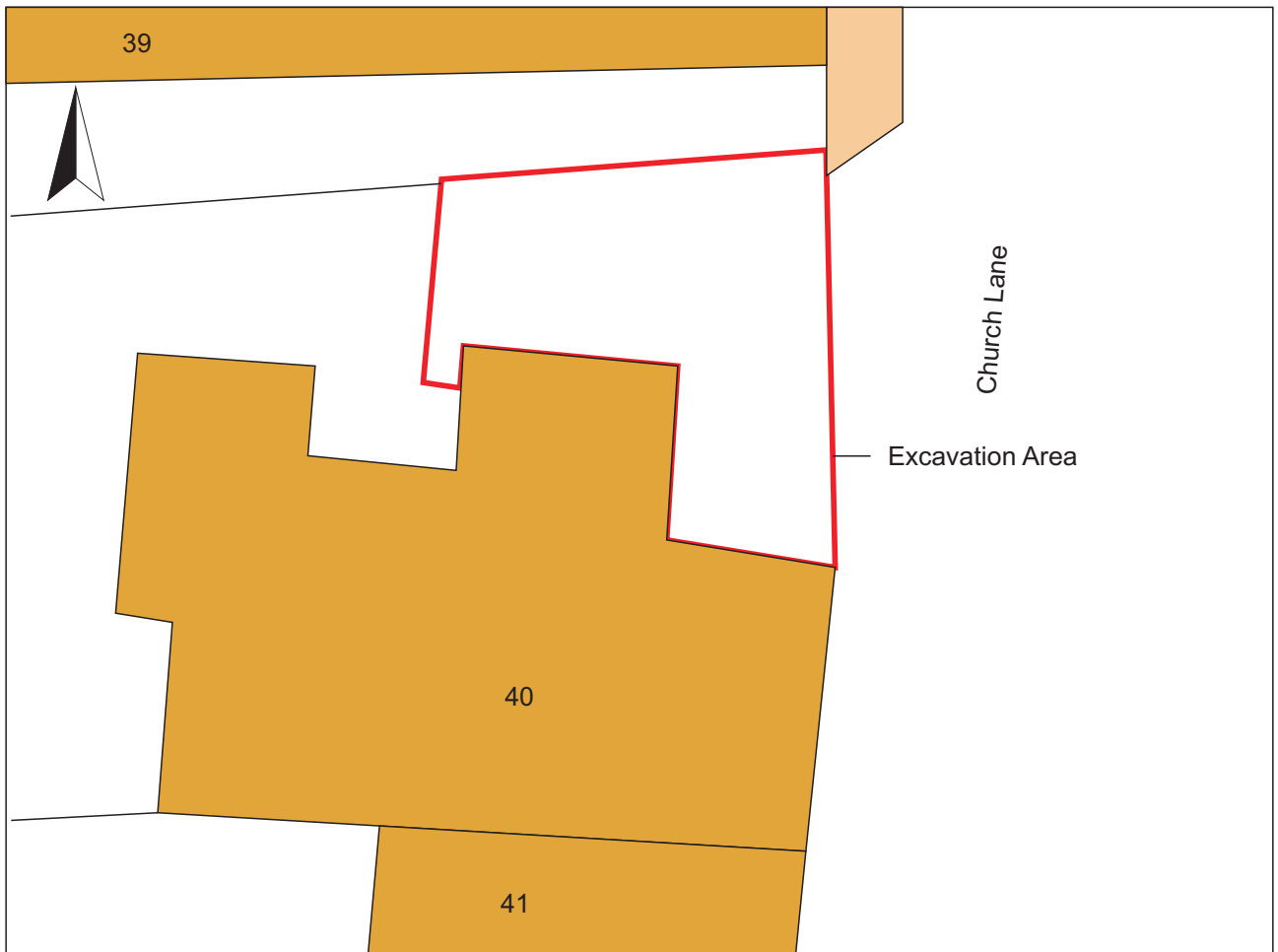
Contexts in square brackets refer to cuts; those in italics refer to other sections in same feature; those in bold refer to human burials

Context no.	Feature type	Comments	Finds	Date of feature/deposit
1	Garden soil	Rowel-spur	P G T CP sf	19th-20th century
2	Subsoil		T	Post-medieval
3 [4]	Pit		P T	Late 15th-16th century
5 [6]	Pit		-	Late 15th-16th century
7	Chalk bedrock		-	-
8 9 [10]	Burial		-	Mid 3rd-early 5th century
11 12 [13]	Burial		-	Mid 3rd-early 5th century
14 15 [16]	Burial	Iron nail	sf	Mid 3rd-early 5th century
17 18 [19]	Ditch	Disarticulated human bone	P	Late 15th-16th century
20 [21]	Pit/grave?		-	Mid 3rd-early 5th century
22 23 [24] 36 37 [38]	Pipe trench		-	20th century
25	Concrete surface		-	20th century
26 27 [28]	Burial	Iron nail	sf	Mid 3rd-early 5th century
29 30 [31]	Posthole	Modern fence	-	20th century
32 [33]	Posthole	Modern fence	-	20th century
34 [35]	Posthole	Modern fence	-	20th century

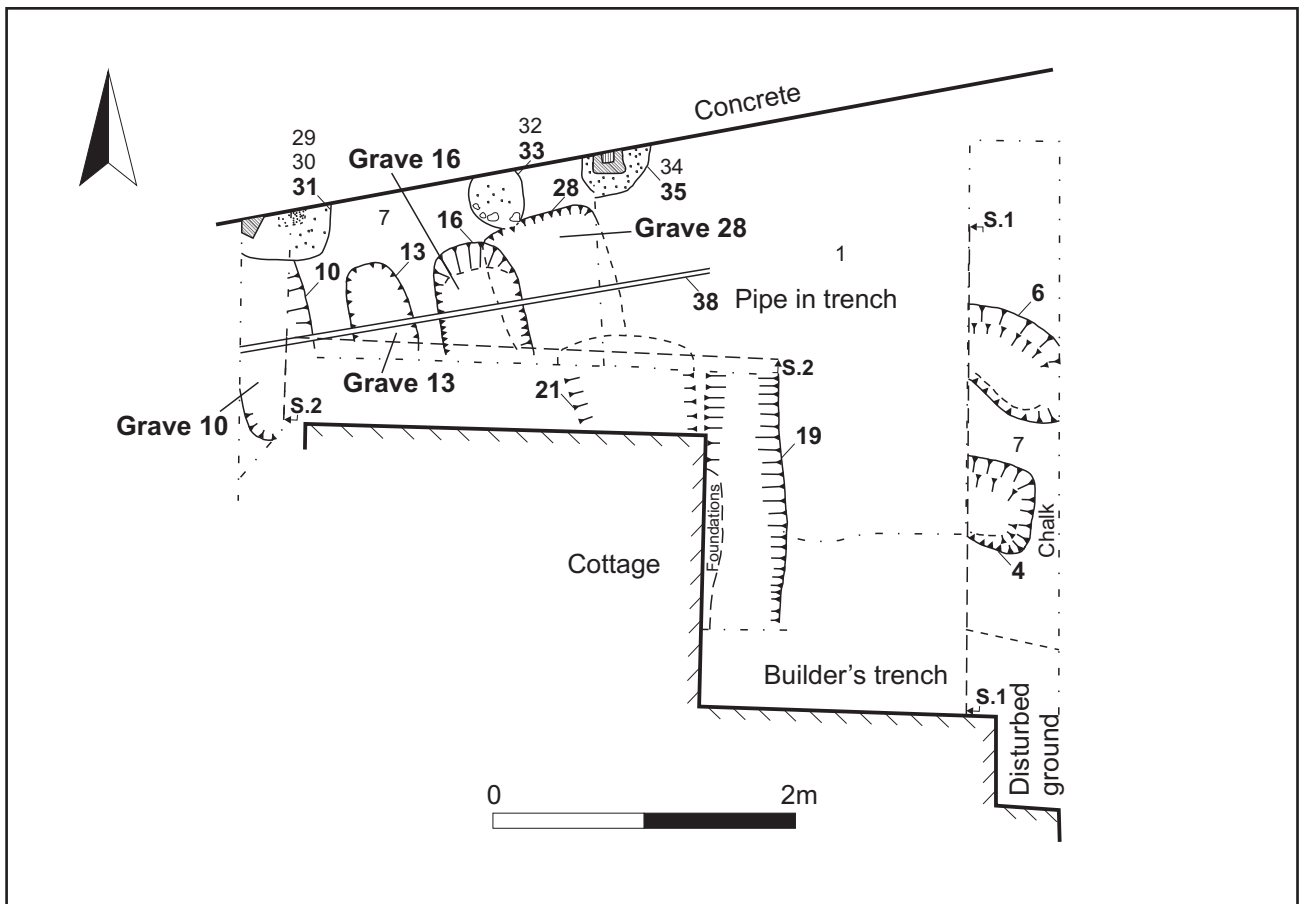


Scale 1:5000

Site location & Historic Environment Record (HER) sites Fig 1

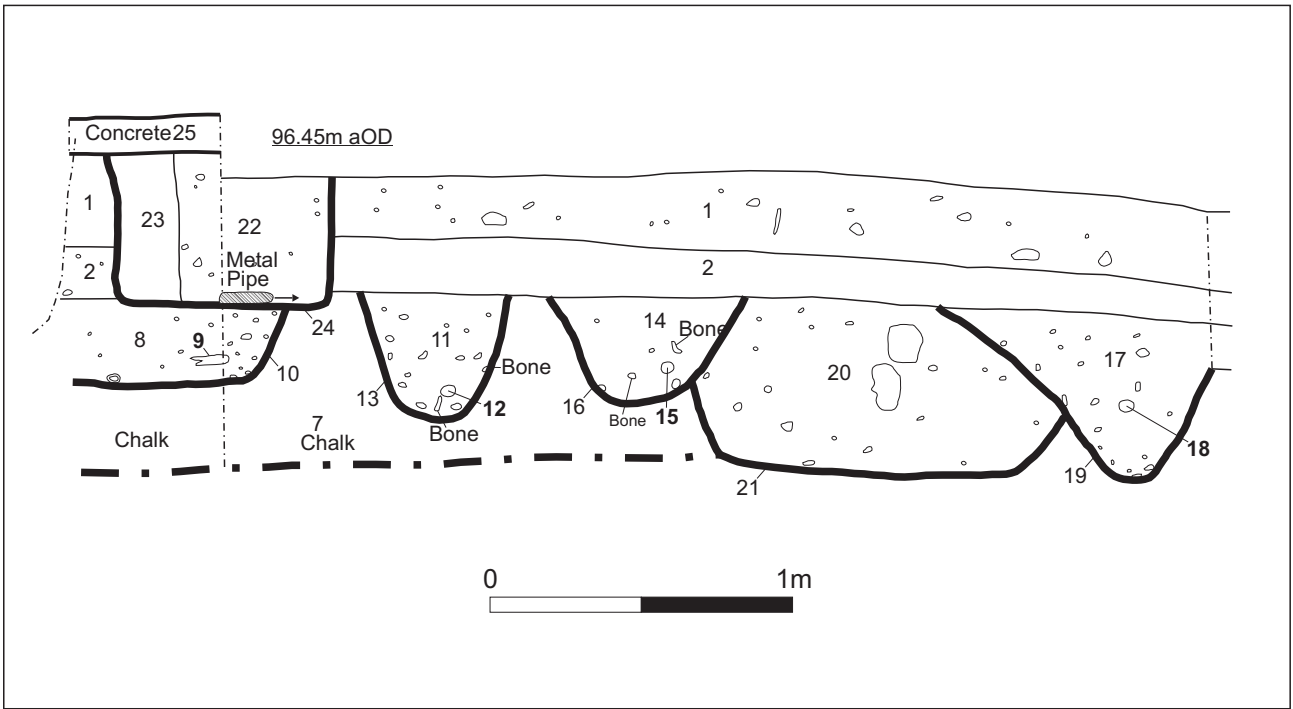


Location of excavation area Fig 2



Scale 1:50

Plan of excavation Fig 3



Scale 1:25

Roman graves and late 15th/early 16th century ditch (Section 2) Fig 4



Grave 10, Burial 9 Fig 5



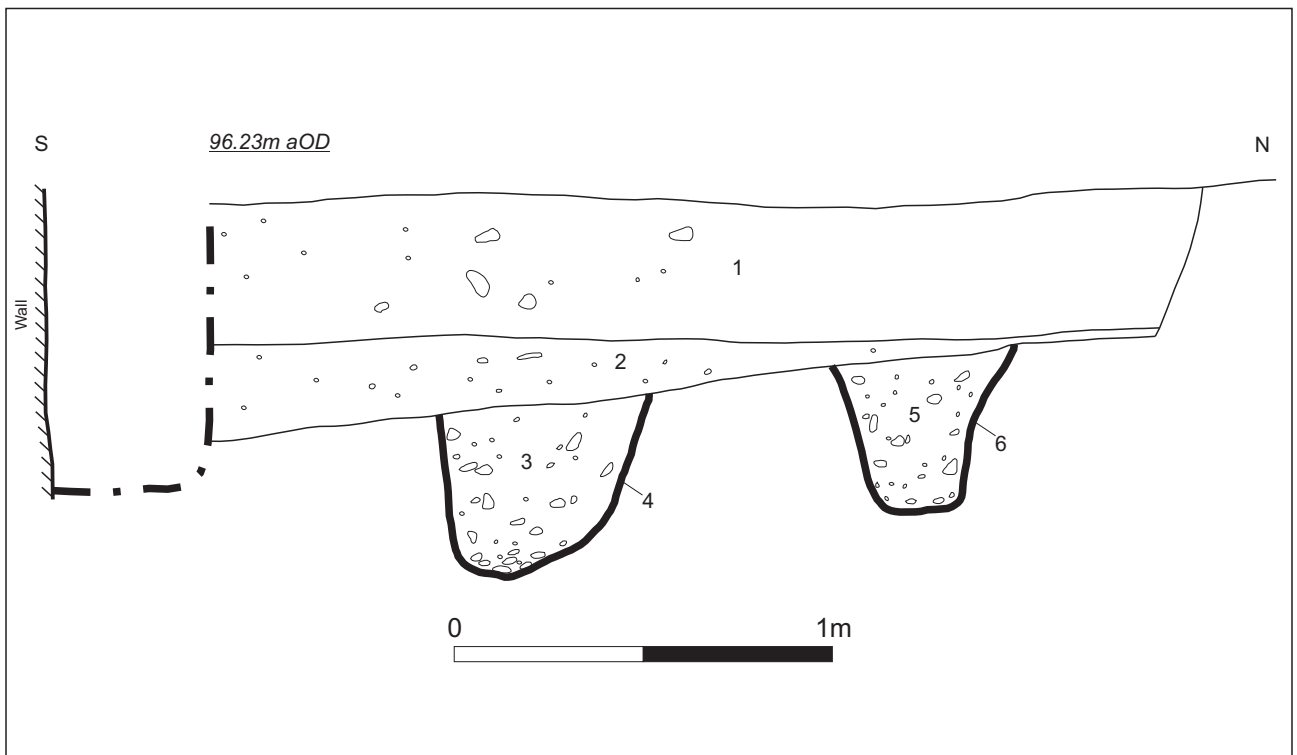
Grave 13, Burial 12 Fig 6



Grave 16, Burial 15 Fig 7



Grave 28, Burial 26 Fig 8



Scale 1:20

Late 15th/16th century pits, (Section 1) Fig 9



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General view of the excavation area, looking south-west

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