

HUMAN BURIALS

at

1, Trinity Close

Felmersham

In 1980 and 1982 three complete skeletons were dug up in the back garden of 1 Trinity Close and between 1983 and 1990 a further five burials were found during building work. It is also reported that a skeleton was found during the building of 9 Trinity Close in 1962.

The Skeletons were buried East-West with the heads to the West in the usual Christian fashion, (so that when they rise on the day of judgement they face the East). Three of the skeletons were found very close to each other with the legs of one across the other. This suggests a mass burial or a family grave. Because of their East-West orientation they are considered not to be pagan Saxon burials.

An early 14C(?) clip and a piece of pottery of the type used from the Saxon period up to at least the 14C were found buried near the 3 skeletons. However they may only be accidentally associated with the burials, either falling into the graves when they were cut or alternatively dug out of the ground and shovelled back in with the rest of the fill. Both were given to the Bedford Museum.

A pig's skull was found buried near the head of one of the skeletons.

A problem remains in that the burials are some distance from the present churchyard, and there appears to be no evidence that the church itself has moved. Possibilities include:

- 1) The existence of a manorial chapel or other church with burial rights, which seems unlikely.
- 2) That at some date the churchyard was insufficient to take the dead. If an early 14th C. date is correct, then this could possibly be connected with one of several epidemics and other economic disasters of the period - not necessarily the Great Plague itself - which resulted in high mortality rates.
- 3) A third possibility is that since medieval times both Pavenham and Radwell were chapelries of Felmersham and all burials from these villages had to take place in Felmersham. To cover such a wide area, particularly in a period of high mortality, might well have required extra burial space.



1980



1980 to 1982. Three skeletons found during
hole digging at the top of the garden



1982



Photograph showing a pigs head found near the skull



1990. Two skulls found during the building of an extension.





Skeletons found during the building of the retaining wall and during the digging of the foundations for the oil tank.

METAL OBJECT

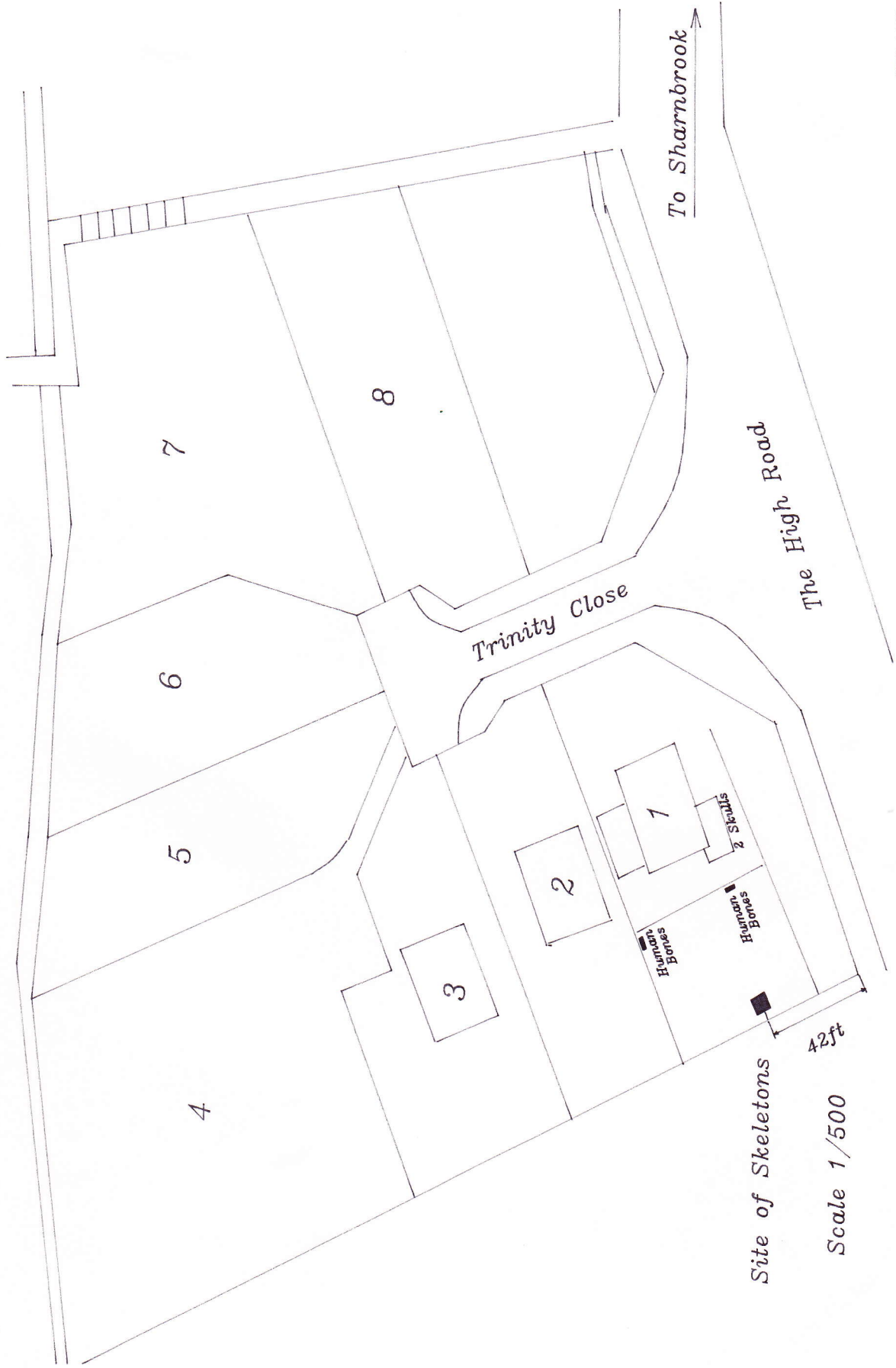
Bronze clip, approximately 40 mm, quite finely worked. This item has been broken at one end. If the broken end originally curved round to match the surviving one, it would suggest a belt attachment of some kind. However, from its fineness and lightness, and from the small gap between the opposing holes, which were presumably drilled to take a rivet, it would seem that the broken end was probably flat, and that it was a loop-fastener on the edge or cuff of a jerkin or similar item of clothing, into which an opposing hook would clip - perhaps one of a whole series of clips. The general impression both here* and at Bedford Museum was of a probable early 14th century date; again, it was not generally felt to be Saxon.

*Conservation Section of the County Planning Dept.

POTTERY

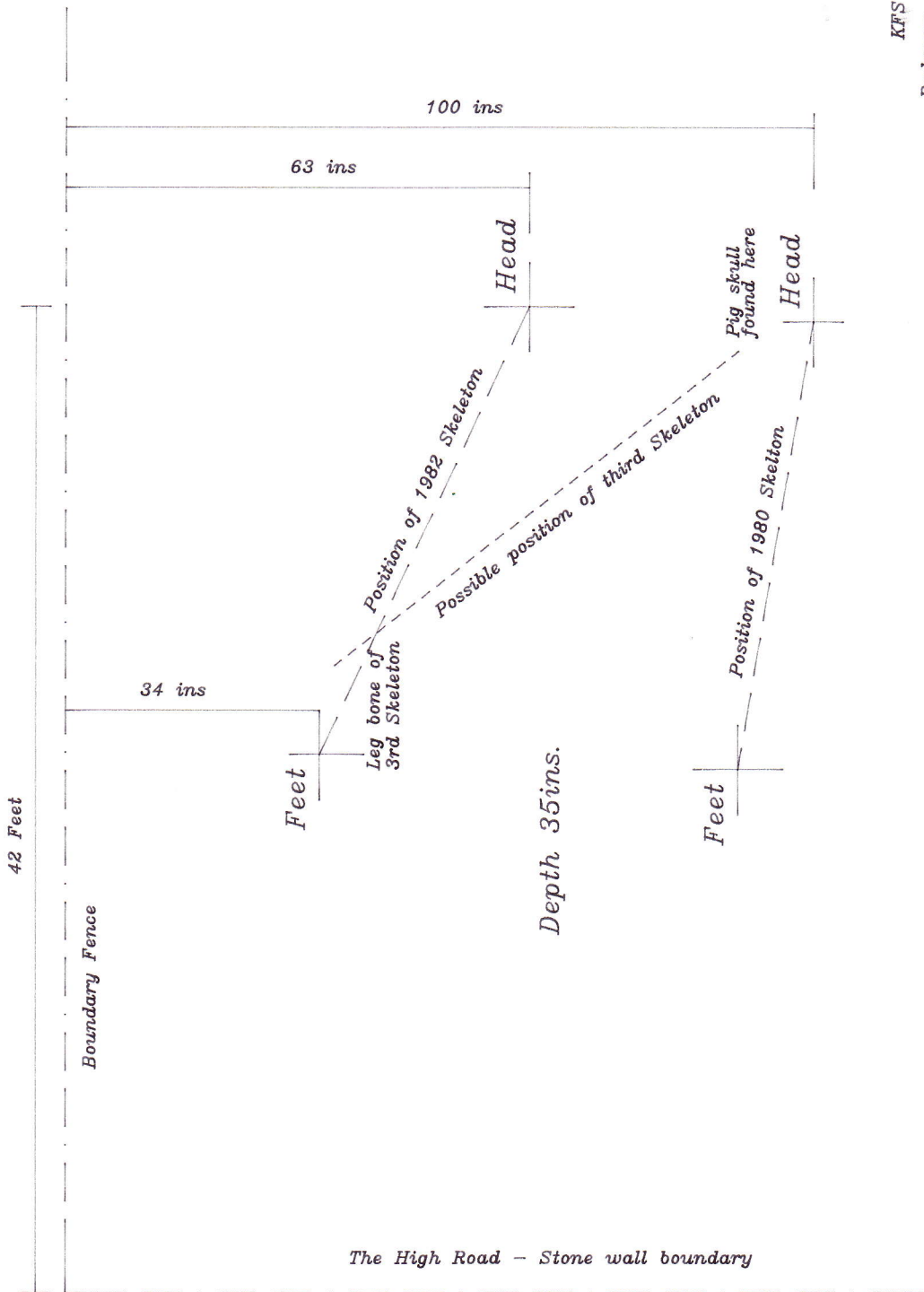
One piece of coarse, probably hand-made shell-tempered ware, part of a side of a very large bowl. If round it must have had a very considerable diameter but it may have been oval. No obvious parallels come to mind. The general opinion amongst staff here* and at Bedford Museum was that this was probably a late (ie medieval) example of a type of pottery produced from the Saxon period until at least the 14th century. It was generally felt not to be Saxon.

*Conservation Section of the County Planning Dept.



Site of Skeletons

Scale 1/500



KFS
Redrawn 1992

Not to scale
Sketch Showing the Position of Skeletons found at
1, Trinity Close, Felmersham Bedford

FINDS FROM TRINITY CLOSE, FELMERSHAM

Pottery

One piece of coarse, probably hand-made shell-tempered ware. This is part of the side of a very large bowl. If round it must have had a very considerable diameter but it may have been oval. No obvious parallels come to mind. The general opinion among staff here and at Bedford Museum was that this was probably a late (i.e. medieval) example of a type of pottery produced from the Saxon period until at least the 14th century. It was generally felt not to be Saxon.

Metal object

Bronze clip, approx 4 cm, quite finely worked. This item has been broken at one end. If the broken end originally curved round to match the surviving one, it would suggest a belt attachment of some kind. However, from its fineness and lightness, and from the small gap between the opposing holes, which were presumably drilled to take a rivet, it would seem that the broken end was probably flat, and that this was a loop-fastener on the edge or cuff of a jerkin or similar item of clothing, into which an opposing hook would clip - perhaps one of a whole series of clips. The general impression both here and at Bedford Museum was of a probable early 14th century date: again, it was not generally felt to be Saxon.

General Conclusions

These are certainly not pagan Saxon burials. They are oriented East-West, with heads to West in usual Christian fashion (so that when they rise on the Day of Judgement they will face East. Priests however were buried facing their flock). The objects found with the skeletons are therefore probably accidentally associated with them, perhaps falling into the grave when it was being cut. Alternatively they were dug out of the ground by the grave digger and shovelled back with the rest of the fill.

A problem remains in that these burials are some distance from the present churchyard, and there appears to be no evidence that the church itself has been moved. Possibilities include (1) the existence of a manorial chapel or other church with burial rights, which seems unlikely; (2) that at some date the churchyard was insufficient to take the dead. If an early 14th century date is correct, then this could possibly be connected with one of the several epidemics and other economic disasters of the period - not necessarily the Great Plague itself - which resulted in high mortality rates. If so, it goes without saying that there is no risk of infection 500 years later! (3) A third possibility is that since in Medieval times both Pavenham and Radwell were chapelries of Felmersham, all burials from these villages had to take place at Felmersham. To cover such a wide area, particularly in a period of high mortality, might well have required extra burial space.

John Wood
Conservation Section
County Planning Dept. September 1982