

2. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Wardell Armstrong was commissioned to undertake an archaeological excavation in the grounds of St Mary's (Leith), 30 Links Garden, Leith, Edinburgh (NGR: NT 27750 75980) in advance of the construction of a new two-classroom building. An archaeological evaluation was undertaken prior to the excavation, in which coffins were discovered. A single area measuring 286.71m² was excavated, broadly equating to the footprint of the proposed new classrooms (WA 2016: 1).

The archaeological excavation revealed coffined and shrouded human burials and burial pits. A total of 81 separate interments were recorded from the excavation area, with the remains of 71 individuals recovered. Artefacts retrieved from the bodies

revealed an early to mid-17th-century date for the interments, and documentary evidence, along with scientific and technological data, points to the burials being associated with the 1645 outbreak of plague in Leith (Campbell 1827: 145). A number of these coffins were disturbed by square pits, located in the centre of the site. These pits contained early to mid-19th-century artefactual material. While their function remains unclear, it is possible that they were used by ropery and sailcloth manufacturers, located to the north of the site (Ainslie 1804). By the late 19th century a wooden smallpox hospital had been established to the north of the site, and by 1905 a second structure had been established to the east of the smallpox hospital, which went out of use in *c* 1912. St Mary's (Leith), then known as the Links School, was established at the site by 1931.