

4. THE EXCAVATION: THE BURIALS

The archaeological excavation was undertaken at St Mary's (Leith) because of the results of a previous evaluation. The evaluation had been carried out primarily because of the possibility of remains linked to the siege of Leith. The evaluation identified burials in coffins. The subsequent excavation was intended to clarify the nature and context of these burials, which were not contained within a known consecrated burial ground. The excavation's principal research question was thus focused on why the burials were on the Links. Three potential scenarios were postulated for the burials: they related to the siege of Leith in 1560; they related to the 1645 plague outbreak; or they related to the late 19th-century smallpox hospital.

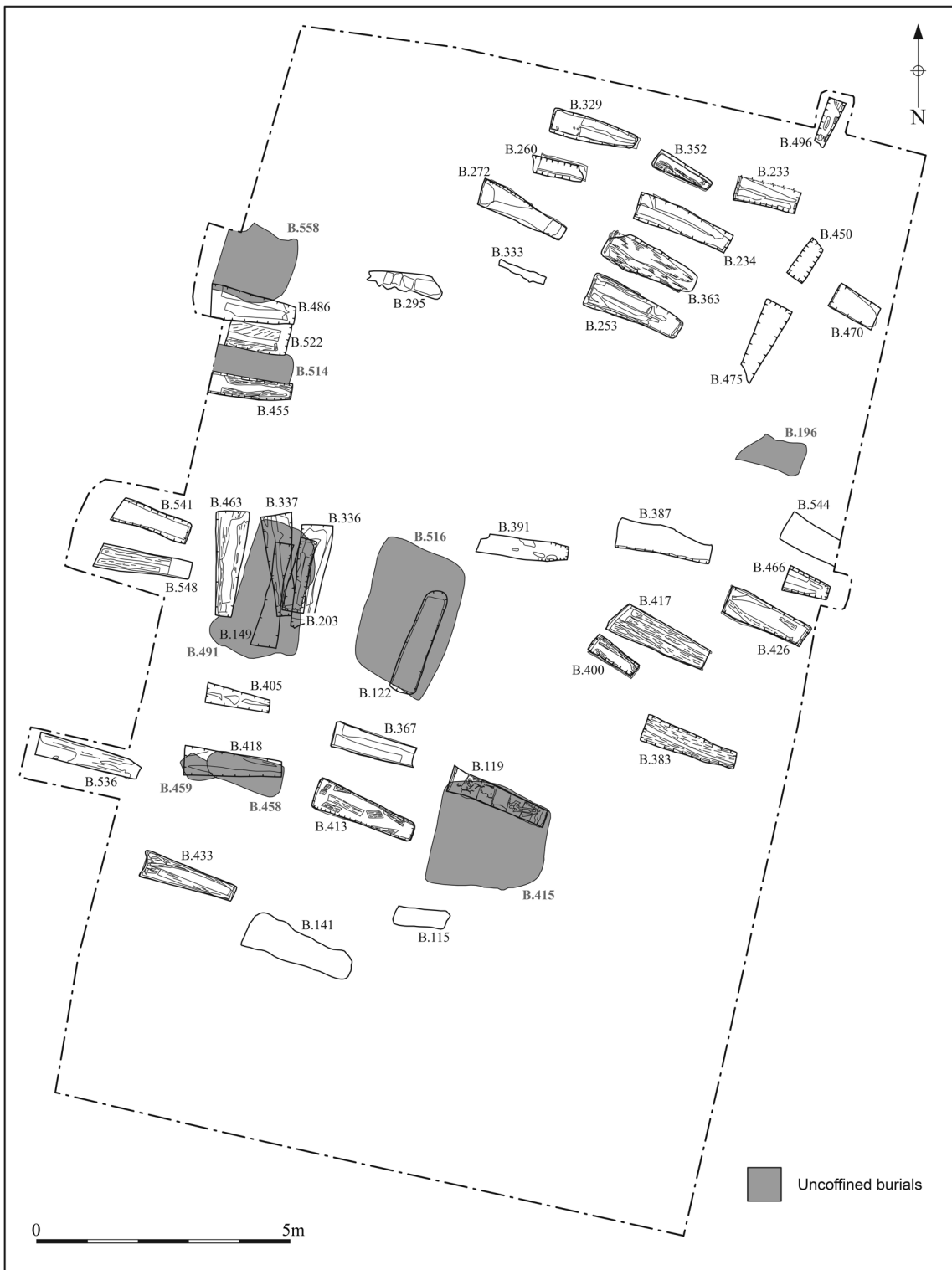
The excavation revealed coffined and shrouded human burials, burial pits and non-funerary-related

rectangular and square pits (Illus 3). Four phases of activity were evident on the site, with the human remains relating to Phases 1 and 2. Phase 1 consisted of burial pits. Phase 2 consisted of east–west-aligned coffined burials with a sub-phase, Phase 2a, featuring north–south-aligned coffined burials (WA 2016: 11–22).

Archaeological activity in Phase 1 was represented by burial pits. Artefacts retrieved from the bodies in Phase 1 included coins dating to the reigns of James VI (1566–1625) and Charles I (1625–49). Activity in Phase 2 was represented by east–west- and north–south-aligned coffined and uncoffined burials (Illus 4). Phases 1, 2a and 2b all relate to the mid-17th century (ie 1645–6); the Phase 2 burials are highly likely to comprise later burials within this time frame (potentially the autumn or winter months of 1645 as opposed to the spring months of 1645).



Illus 3 Overall plan of the archaeological features – all phases © Wardell Armstrong LLP



Illus 4 Plan of the burials © Wardell Armstrong LLP