

TITLE PAGE

**"Corporal Punishment and the Grace of God": The Archaeology of
a Nineteenth Century Girls' Reformatory.**

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Abstract

The site of St John's, near Kapunda, South Australia, provides a unique insight into the internal dynamics and materiality of a 19th century Catholic girls' reformatory and the silent lives of the young women, both inmates and nuns, who were confined there. The organization and material culture of the site reflects the intersection of Australian colonial, Catholic and 'middle class' ideologies. This institution's purpose was to reform through the imparting of a Catholic hegemony of 'appropriate' female behaviour and sexuality; this hegemony was supported by enculturation, which included the altering, confining, decorating and ordering of the St John's space. The site and its assemblage, whilst small, demonstrate the framework for, and materiality of, the reformatory system that was underpinned by deep traditions of female confinement based in Catholic institutional models. Gender as a social process is key to reading and interpreting the materiality of the St John's Reformatory for girls. Gender frames, informs and contextualizes the materiality of the site, its aims, operation, and thus its archaeological interpretation. Further, the ideological gender roles and regimes related through historical accounts provide the context for the embeddedness of gender in the material culture found.

Key Words

Gender, Girls' Reformatory, ideology, Institutions, religion

"Corporal Punishment and the Grace of God": The Archaeology of a 19th Century Girls' Reformatory

Introduction

The site known as St John's, near Kapunda in South Australia, provides a unique insight into the internal dynamics and materiality of a 19th century Catholic girls' reformatory and the silent lives of the young women, both inmates and nuns, who were confined there. This paper teases out the archaeological signatures of the institution's ideology, reading the landscape, architecture, artefacts and written accounts as discourses on femininity and masculinity. Reflecting on a growing literature about the archaeology of institutions internationally (Baugher 2010; Beisaw & Gibb 2009; Gilchrist 1994; Myers & Moshenska 2011; Spencer-Wood and Baugher 2001), in an Australian context (Casella & Fredrickson 2004; Davies et al 2013; Gibbs 2007; Piddock 2007) it is apparent that the lived experiences of institutionalised young women and girls have remained largely unidentified or subsumed within studies of adult populations in prisons or asylums. The exceptions are studies by Casella (2000, 2001, 2007) and De Cunzo (1995, 2001, 2006) who focused on gender, sexuality and power as themes to explore the experience of the institutionalised female children and young women. The research presented in this paper also fills a gap in the archaeology of religious men and women in Australia. Though in operation for a short time, from 1897 to 1909, the site of St John's is an intricate microcosm of the reformatory experience that elucidates important currents in late 19th century social and political thought towards female juvenile crime and detention in colonial Australia.

The Gendered Institution

The theme of gender is vital to understanding institutions from historical and archaeological perspectives, as demonstrated by Casella's 2001 study of the Ross Female Factory. Bosworth (2000) argued that the rise of separate women's institutions, asylums, and specifically reformatories, are continuums of far older practices that were markedly influenced by deep-rooted Judaic,

Christian and Greco-Roman ideologies. Such ideologies informed 18th and 19th century notions of 'appropriate' masculine and feminine behavior and the criminalisation of female sexual delinquency. Perhaps the best known—even infamous—template for female institutions was the Magdalen Asylums (or Laundries) first established in 1758 in England to deal with the twin social problems posed by female prostitution and unmarried mothers (Finnegan 2001:8). In 19th Century Australia, the Catholic Church created separate Catholic and gender-based reformatories in response to a growing Catholic underclass (see Kovesi 2006). Despite the differences between Australia and Europe, all Catholic institutions shared distinctive features and were governed by Rome. Most important was the belief that receiving guidance under Catholic nuns for a protracted period was the most effective means of reforming young women.

South Australian Reformatories 1869-1909

Reformatories were established in South Australia following the passing of the *Destitute Persons Relief Act (1866/7)*. The first, for boys, opened at Burnside in 1869, and in 1880 was transferred to the hulk *Fitzjames* moored off suburban Semaphore. In 1887 the newly created State Children's Council (SCC) relocated the boys to a purpose built facility at Magill that was used as both an industrial school and reformatory. Girls were moved to the Magill site in 1881, having all been detained at the Destitute Asylum on Kintore Avenue prior to this time, then to Edwardstown from 1891 to 1898 (see Geyer 1994). All children were sent to the institutions under court order, though transfers for good conduct to the Industrial School was at the discretion of the Executive Council (Dickey 1986:57). This system detained girls for reasons such as destitution, vagrancy, uncontrollable behaviour, consorting with boys or drinking alcohol (Wimshurst 1984). Barbarlet (1983) observed that half of all reformatory girls in the South Australian system between 1887 and 1892 were of Irish descent, in spite of the fact that the Irish made up only 14% of the total population. The environment of the reformatory system was actively used to produce the desirable outcomes of removing these 'delinquent' girls from the streets not only because they were "bad", but because they were poor,

Catholic, Irish, and female. The *State Children's Act* of 1895 permitted the establishment of two rural reformatories under the supervision of the SCC. A Catholic reformatory, St John's, near Kapunda was gazetted as an Industrial School, while Protestant girls were sent to the former Redruth prison in Burra (Prest et al. 2001).

St. John's, Kapunda

Near Kapunda, in the mid-north of South Australia, a Catholic church, presbytery and cemetery named St. John the Evangelist (St John's) was founded in 1849 to meet the needs of a growing Irish Catholic community working at the local copper mine (see Arthure 2014; Charlton 1971). Initially a slab hut, a more substantial church and presbytery were opened in 1854. After year of disuse the buildings were repurposed for use as a girls' reformatory in 1897. The church was converted into a dormitory for the girls and the presbytery furnished for the use of the sisters, with the additions of bathrooms, kitchen and veranda on the original building and some tree planting, including a palm (Swann nd). The first group of ten girls arrived at St John's in June 1897. During the twelve years of its existence a total of 125 girls were detained there, with between 12 and 21 girls and five sisters and matron resident at any one time. All aged between 12 and 18, the majority of girls were charged with being uncontrollable, accusations that were almost always couched in terms of real or imagined sexual promiscuity. There are no comprehensive records of the inmates, but the scant existing documentation indicates that most had no official sentences or mandated release dates. As an Adelaide journalist reported after a visit to the St John's reformatory:

The girls look well, and on the whole do not give much trouble. Two of them managed to scale the high iron fence, with the help of some young men, who wanted a lark, and ran away to Gawler, where they were caught by mounted constables and brought back. Sad to relate, the good sisters, after holding out for a year, have come to the same conclusion as others in their position, and say that corporal punishment is the only thing that makes some of those girls fit for

society. "Corporal punishment and the grace of God." I commend their verdict to people who desire to do away with capital punishment and things of that sort. And yet these girls are in most cases suffering for the sins of their parents; they have been "born in sin and shapen in iniquity." *Weekly Herald* 10 December 1898

Newspaper reports and documentation submitted to the SCC indicate that the girls undertook a variety of tasks, from gardening, laundering, corset and shirt making for sale in town, sewing—both plain and fancy work—knitting, and making their own clothes, to wood chopping, the laying of garden beds and tending cows, horses, poultry and birds (*Kapunda Herald* 27 October 1899). This was in addition to the regime of prayer, daily mass, choir, lessons and meticulous cleaning. Reports to the SCC also indicate that there were plans to run St John's as a Magdalen Laundry to gain further revenue, but due to water shortages and the abrupt closing of the reformatory, these never eventuated.

Newspaper accounts between 1899 and 1908 also documented various escape attempts. These escape attempts led to adaptations to the buildings so as to further control the girls' movements and limit their access to space (Figure 1). By 1899 the girls had been divided into two classes, and a 'second class' dormitory was added so that the better girls would not be 'contaminated' further by bad behaviour. Two internal 6ft x 6ft cells, a sisters' room, a linen press a larger 11ft high (3.35m) fence enclosing all buildings, and iron bars on all windows were added (*Kapunda Herald* 27 October 1899). Historical accounts also note that three cells external were also constructed (*The Chronicle* 12 June 1897). At the same time, the church was subdivided into a chapel, dining room and workroom, and a large water tank was built at the rear of the presbytery in addition to the small underground tank that had been installed for the presbytery in 1850. When the Archbishop closed the reformatory in 1909 the eleven girls resident at the time were transferred to the Protestant Redruth Girls Reformatory at Burra as this was the only girl's reformatory operating in the State at that time.

[Figure 1 site plan here]

The archaeology of St John's

Archaeological survey and excavation in 2012 and 2013 at St John's aimed to locate and assess any material surviving at St John's and to recover as much data as possible from artefacts and architectural features remaining in situ. Although there are histories of the site available (for example Swann nd), much of this work is speculative and relies on the same few primary sources and an enduring urban mythology. The site is approximately 10 hectares in area, with the rubble of the church and reformatory complex concentrated within 1500 square metres in the western corner of the property (Figure 1). Unfortunately, the entire complex of buildings had been razed to the ground over two periods in 1947 and 2002, the latter arising from the local Catholic community's desire to deter people from 'ghost hunting' at the site—a popular pastime there since at least the 1970s. A key remaining landmark is a palm tree located east of the reformatory, which provides a valuable datum based on its spatial context in historical photographs marking the building's entrance.

Pre-disturbance surveys were undertaken in 2012 and 2013, along with a geophysical investigation in 2013 using ground penetrating radar, a fluxgate dual sensor gradiometer and metal detector to identify footings or soil disturbance. Hand excavations were conducted in 2013. The demolition rubble appears to have been pushed into the centre of the main presbytery/convent buildings, which meant that excavation of this area was not possible. In addition, much of the site's surface was sterile in terms of artefacts, likely due to cleaning of the site by caretakers, or the removal of artefacts as 'souvenirs', since the 2002 demolition has done little to deter ghost hunters. The excavations focused on three main areas: the church foundations, a structure documented as three extant external cells and a depression with surface artefact lenses that identified an area of high archaeological potential.

The church (Trench A)

Based on pre-disturbance surveys and geophysical data, a 4m x 3m trench was excavated 17 metres due east of the gated entrance to the site (survey marker 6829-1004, Figure 1). This was selected to determine the location of the 1850 church, which had functioned as a church, chapel, dormitory, dining room and workroom over its lifetime. An east-west running wall and footing were located and from this data its spatial relationship to other buildings was determined. Notable artefacts recovered included an 1875 coin, brooch, buttons, domestic refuse and a St Jude religious medal.

The 'cells' (Trench B)

The feature known locally as 'the cells' was built in 1897 and was excavated in its entirety. The excavation uncovered a 4.57m (15 ft) square bluestone structure built into the slope of the hill on two levels, with the upper, ground level half divided into three cubicles, each 0.9m (3ft) wide and 2.1m (7ft) long. Each cubicle was identical and separated by stone walls 0.6m (2ft) wide. Based on historical photographs the building would have had a height of approximately 2 metres (6.5ft). Each 'cubicle' contained a one metre square bluestone footing lined with mortar to a depth of the natural ground level. At the rear of each footing a chute sloped down from the northern rear wall of each cubicle and opened into the lower half of the structure, which was built below ground level. This was a single rectangular 1.55m (5ft) deep cement-rendered pit. The sloping sides of all three chutes were lined with glass sheets, angled at 70 degrees. There were inserts in the pit walls for roof timbers, indicating that this section would have been fully enclosed underground, and a thin layer of bitumen sealed the foundation. No staining, damp or organic layers at the bottom were present to indicate any use as a septic tank or lavatory, however drainage away from pit appears to have been installed later, cut into the foundation. The base of the feature was dry. There were largely sterile contexts of soil filling this pit, with artefacts found close to the contemporary ground surface and clustered around the chute openings, as well as across the base of the pit. The location of artefact concentrations indicates that some artefacts may have been lost or deliberately placed down the chutes or at the bottom of the pit prior to filling or abandonment, rather than as part of systematic, accumulative, refuse disposal. Interpretation of this

feature has been challenging, with no clear purpose identified, nor have any comparative structures been located. The division of the structure into three separate cubicles that indicates individuals doing the same activity separately and in private, but also at the same time, and that was high volume activity thus was possibly used or as a shower block, washrooms, or laundry room. In this context, then, the archaeological investigation refutes the persistent local story that this structure was three external cells for confinement.

Surface depression (Test pits 1-4)

A 10m x 5 m depression with a surface scatter of 19th century domestic artefacts was identified in a pre-disturbance survey. Test pits were identified as the most appropriate means to determine whether this may have been a rubbish disposal area and to obtain a systematic and representative sample of artefacts from all phases of occupation of the site (see Figure 1). Test pit one was sterile, test pits two, three and four contained a range of artefacts, including some finials and grave railings that were identical to those remaining in the first cemetery. This may indicate that broken/damaged material from the old cemetery was 'cleaned up' prior to the 1897 opening of the reformatory. The interpretation is that it was an area with a slow build up of materials, possibly as an area for burying domestic rubbish throughout the life of the reformatory: the total number of ceramic fragments recovered from test pits 1-3 (n=158) represents 40% of the site's entire ceramic assemblage (n=395).

{Table 1 here –artefact results}

Constructing Femininity – The Materials of Reform

The premise of this paper is that it is possible (and necessary) to identify archaeological evidence of gender ideologies within the institution. There is, however, no one-size-fits-all approach to doing so. In adopting a pragmatic analysis of the site, a minimalist interpretation of the assemblage occurred, adhering to already well established, functionally-based artefact classifications. But does such an approach prove useful in identifying the

archaeological signatures of these ideologies? Can this information be obtained from the historical information alone? The excavated assemblage and built remains are not unlike any materials found on Australian historic sites – glass, ceramic, metal, animal bones. Domesticity was clearly part of the cultural milieu of colonial South Australia. The question then becomes how can gender, religious ideology, sexuality and reform be interpreted in these remains? How can the nun's possessions be distinguished from those of the girls? Any archaeological analysis of a girls' reformatory – a 'female' site—requires moving beyond the simple dichotomies of male/female, good/bad, detainer/detainee or open/closed to a more nuanced reading of the data. It must consider that the Catholic hegemony over female sexuality was instilled through the organisation and teachings of the reformatory, including the process of classification as a girl in need of reform and the self-classification through which the Sisters identified themselves as religious women. This hegemony was supported by enculturation, which included the altering, confining, decorating and ordering of the St John's space. Hence the choice of alterations, decorations, furnishings, tablewares, food, clothing and so forth, are all deliberate expressions of the reformatory and gender ideologies. The materials present reinforced and shaped behavior. The landscape that began as a church and presbytery, was costly, imposing, but open and public, and built to be lived in by one man. It was later altered to contain up to 25 young women at a time, with high iron fences, barred windows, cells, private and isolated. These physical changes were made to control young women acting outside their gender norms, although it was arguably conceptualised, built and managed by men. The notions of discipline, ritual, and routine through activities of sewing, laundering, cleaning and cooking reveal the suite of skills considered necessary for the girls to work as domestic servants, and, through repetition of such tasks and religious practices (and particular attitudes towards sexuality), inmates were also 'performing' and modelling their appropriate gender role, represented in a repetition or patterning of material culture.

De Cunzo (1995:48) demonstrated how modern discipline and gender both had material manifestations in the increasing segmentation and elaboration of

dining. On this site ceramics were a particularly useful material class for 'reading' female gender discourse. The excavated ceramic material (n= 395) revealed a predominance of food service ceramic vessels (MNV of 16), including serving dishes and platters. A range of plates and bowls in standard forms were also present, and the assemblage recovered suggests that the reformatory acquired neither its ceramic nor glass tableware in matching sets. There was a relatively high proportion of teacups (MNV of 17), including some made of porcelain (MNV=4). Saucers (MNV of 11) were also of diverse designs and none were matching cup/saucer sets. The range of decorative techniques on tableware and teaware included moulded, banded and transfer printed in a range of colours and designs. The multivalence of type, decoration and pattern on tea and table wares were likely reflective of both what was available and a choice, by the sisters, of middle class, fashionable items over plain undecorated whiteware. In the gendered institution of a girls' reformatory, inmates prepared and served food that was eaten communally. The ceramics suggest that that meals were served on large platters, with individual smaller plates or bowls used by each individual. It is likely that the sisters' and girls' diets were shared and consumed at the same times. Larger plate sizes recovered (dinner plates MNV of 11, twiffler MNV of 5) indicate the type of meals and the quantity of food served on a regular basis: cheap meat cuts and large pots of stew, and perhaps vegetables grown on site. The various sets of teawares may have been used for consumption or entertaining guests, or for domestic training and perhaps instruction on tea service. The variety of patterns may indicate goods having been donated, possibly by a range of benefactors or purchased on an ad hoc basis by the sisters when required. The opportunistic acquisition of ceramics may also reflect the lack of funds available for running the site: the costs, borne by the state, were ten shillings for each girl per week. Further, the isolation of the site may have limited the goods available to purchase. Whatever the reason, these artefacts were used for practical purposes – food/tea consumption—but also for reinforcing 'correct' female and middle-class behaviour through tea drinking and food service.

Other items associated with food consumption included a large bone-handled knife, and faunal remains. The faunal assemblage was dominated by rabbit (37.5%; NISP=171) and sheep/goat (28.4% NISP=92), followed by rat, chicken, cow, pigeon and pig. The principal sheep cuts were mutton cutlets, offcuts for soup/stock, then loin and leg. Beef cuts were dominated by rump and pork, particularly by head/jowl for soup or stock. These indicate a diet of cheaper meat cuts, and those appropriate for cooking large communal meals such as stews. There was very little gnawing on the bones, indicating that refuse was mostly buried very quickly. Cleanliness and hygiene were important reforming principles, and it is likely the clean up of food scraps and household waste was regimented. A range of medicinal bottles (MNV=9), such as cough elixir, a nit comb, toothpowder, and a bone toothbrush indicate a concern for personal hygiene and rules for personal behaviour governing bodies (see Shackel 1993). In perhaps a moment of personal action and individuality, or ownership, the letters 'AC' (initials perhaps) were scratched into the toothbrush handle – possibly an indicator that the institution was never able to exercise absolute control of the individual. Although dentist and hospital visits were provided by the State, such items highlight a concern for personal hygiene as part of reform, as well as home treatments for minor illnesses.

[Figure 2 Here – Shoe]

Test pits 2-4 from the surface depression recovered a high number of women's boots and boot parts (n= 35, MNI=14). The sizes range from 14.5cm to 23 cm (current Australia sizes 8 infant to 6.5 womens). Some have a stacked heel, others are flat and thus could have been worn by either the girls or the nuns. In any case they were plain, sturdy and standard, probably issued by the state or readily available and the same style as two boots found under the floorboards of the Adelaide Destitute Asylum (Geyer 1994:16). Some have indications of repair, and all were worn out when discarded. The wearing of uniforms is not documented at St John's, (though that they did make their own clothes was), and a standard 'Girls' outfit in a box' was normally issued to all under state care (Barbarlet 1983:12). Some muslin cloth, two women's belt buckles and two brooches were also found. The two

brooches perhaps indicate that at least some girls were allowed more scope for personal expression or were able to dress more fashionably when sent out for domestic service. These may even have been rewards for good behaviour since the *Adelaide Herald's* Passing Notes for 20 January 1900 stated, "Miss Baker, by her present of a pretty silver brooch to the best girl in the Kapunda Reformatory, set an excellent example".

Buttons (n=25) and other sewing equipment included pins, scissors, beads and thimbles (n= 26). Buttons are a marker of the labour and performance of the gendered tasks carried out on site, as well as the repetition of routine, and self-sufficiency. These were made from a range of materials – shell, bone, copper alloy- and for a range of garments including underwear and corseting, trousers, shirts, dresses and jackets/coats. In 1904 Sister Helena reported to the SCC that the girl's had made 263 articles of clothing for sale in town and wished to obtain more paid laundry work (*South Australia Register* 24 August 1904). The buttons, along with thimbles, scissors and other sewing equipment is evidence of both labour and training and echo the workloads of the Magdalen Asylums.

There is a detectable provision for care and play in small finds - a dolls eye, two knucklebones, a marble and a harmonica—while glass salad oil bottles (MNV= 10), condiment/pickle jars (MNV=4), cordial (MNV=3) and soda water bottles (MNV=6) indicate small indulgences. Letters to the SCC from St John's indicate other small luxuries - that a picnic (off site) was requested for the girls, that flower gardens and canaries were kept, and that 'kind friends' had provided the girls with a croquet set and some other games during the year (*The Southern Cross* 11 October 1907). Glass and ceramic decorative candleholders (n=4), which may have been used to furnish the chapel, and a black rosary bead, were also recovered. The small number of religious artefacts may indicate either that religious materials were cared for/coveted and kept safely, or that, when damaged, were not disposed of with household rubbish.

Slate pencils (n=12), ink bottles (n =12), and ink wells (n=3) reflect the undertaking of daily lessons in writing, reading and arithmetic as well as

religious instruction which were all commonly timetabled, along with daily mass and prayer in Catholic reformatories (Kovesi 2006:73). A religious medallion depicting St Jude (the patron saint of lost causes and of "desperate" or "difficult" cases), is a poignant example of the Catholic tradition of saints as intercessors. The letters "KAPG" have been engraved under the image of St Jude, perhaps indicating specific issuing to St John's using an acronym for Kapunda Girls'. St Jude is also present in the Protestant tradition; however, the use of religious medallions is a particularly Catholic practice (Arthure 2014).

[Figure 3 here – St Jude holy medal]

The artefacts and structures recovered support the historical accounts of life at St John's as punitive, regimented and harsh, but in many ways, a harshness that is typical of any rural colonial household – self-supporting, sparse and isolated. What is different is the intersecting of the colonial-domestic setting with the enactment of religious practice that was the core of this institution. That the girls were penitents in need of reform exemplified by an artefact – the St Jude medallion, but also by the centrality of absolute control of space and movement, evidenced in the remains of structures, cells, fencing and barbed wire. The archaeological record both adds to and contradicts historical accounts; excavation structure of the supposed external cells for confinement has proven to be for a more elusive purpose. Girls as young as 12 were subjected to years of work at St John's. The buttons, fragments of teacups, remains of meals and shoes, are the only remaining physical traces of their presence and work, and how, through repetition, these girls were taught to correctly perform their gender.

Conclusion

Gender as a social process is key to reading and interpreting the materiality of the St John's Reformatory for girls. Gender frames, informs and contextualizes the materiality of the site, its aims, operation, and

archaeological interpretation. The Catholic hegemony over female sexuality was instilled through the organisation and teachings of the reformatory, including the process of classification as a girl in need of reform, and the self-classification through which the Sisters identified themselves as religious women. This hegemony was supported by enculturation, which included the altering, confining, decorating and ordering of the St John's space. The site and its assemblage demonstrate the framework for, and materiality of, the Catholic reformatory system and appropriate female behaviour. This drew upon a deep tradition of female confinement and combined with elements of the existing Magdalen asylums. The artefacts and the structures found at St John's help tell the story of those who resided there, and while not dissimilar to many historical archaeological sites, were used to enforce and teach appropriate feminine roles. Further, the ideological gender roles related through historical documents add another layer of context for interpretation of the material culture found on site. The attitudes towards girls, sexuality and reform are reflected in the material remains of St John's, complemented by Catholic doctrine and known appropriate female practices such as tea service, food preparation, and sewing, which all appear in the artefacts from the site. These artefacts reflect the core principles of the institution. The reformatory was experienced through the physical bodies of both the nuns and the girls, and by repetition, isolation, scarcity and work - a gendered and gendering performance. Driven by the contradictory aims of punishment, welfare and charity, this institution invoked ideals of good and bad femininity to implement its goals.

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Figure Legends

Figure 1: Site Plan of the St John's Reformatory complex indicating the original church and presbytery, and the first and second reformatory alterations. Location and layout of buildings based on total station data from in situ footings, historical images and illustration in Swann (nd). Excavated areas (trench A, B and test pits 2-4) are indicated on the plan.

Figure 2: Woman's boot recovered from excavation at St John's Reformatory (test pit 3) Kapunda. Photo: Cherrie De Leiuen

Figure 3: Religious Medal of St Jude, found in excavation at St John's Reformatory (trench A, church area) Kapunda. Photo: Cherrie De Leiuen

TABLE 1

Artefact distribution from all excavated areas at St John's, grouped by general function and material categories (n=2343)

	Ceramic vessels n=395	Glass- Vessels n=445	Glass- Architectural n=791	Metal Non- Architectural n=69	Metal – Architectural n=222	Faunal Remains n=324	Buttons & Sewing Equipment n=51	Footwear n=35	Special Finds
Trench A (church)	46	34	193	15	19	15	14	0	Coin Brooch Holy Medal
Trench B (the 'cells')	191	234	576	22	105	267	28	9	Coin 1942 Brooch Doll eye Toothbrush Rosary Bead
Test Pit 2	21	32	5	2	50	33	5	3	
Test Pit 3	40	42	3	19	43	4	3	22	
Test Pit 4	97	103	14	11	5	5	1	1	Grave finial