

Chapter 3: Results of the Fieldwork

INTRODUCTION

The results of all phases of fieldwork are presented below, with the watching briefs and evaluation results briefly summarised, and the excavation presented in more detail. Most work was concentrated within the footprint of the proposed Conference Centre - an area previously used as tennis courts - and included Test Pits 1, 3 and 4 of the Watching Brief phase, Trenches 10-13 of the Evaluation, and Areas 1 and 2 of the excavation phases (Fig. 2).

Test Pits 2 and 2a of the Watching Brief were located immediately south of this area, close to the seamen's memorial, whilst Test Pit 5 was further west. Test pit 6 and Trenches 14 and 15 were located to the west in the area of the proposed Student Accommodation. The site of the proposed electrical substation lay to the south of Areas 1 and 2 and north-west of the Maritime Museum (Fig. 2).

Plans of the graves revealed in Areas 1 and 2 during the excavation phase are shown in Figures 11 and 12. The plans also show the location of the piling trenches (numbered trenches 3000-3016 in Area 1; and 6000-12 in Area 2). Excavated graves are indicated with hachures. Similarly, the two excavated graves located within Trench 15, just south-west of Area 2, and the excavated grave in the proposed substation site are shown in Figures 7 and 8 respectively. The character and contents of these graves are summarised in the Grave Catalogue (Appendix 2).

FIELDWORK RESULTS

Archaeological watching brief, July 1999

The watching brief maintained on the excavation of seven engineering test pits located within the vicinity of the Infirmary and Devonport Buildings. Test pits 3 and 4 and Test pit 5 were excavated to a maximum depth of 3 m. Test pits 1, 2 and 2a were excavated to a depth of 1.8 m below the present ground surface.

Undisturbed natural was revealed in each of the test pits and was commonly yellowish gravelly sand. A dark reddish silt layer seen in Test pit 5 was interpreted as the silting of a north-south orientated palaeochannel of uncertain date.

With the exception of Test pit 5, where a modern brick drain had truncated earlier deposits, every test pit revealed a substantial layer of disturbed or dumped sandy silt subsoil commonly containing fragments of 18th- and 19th-century brick, tile and mortar fragments. The presence of this building debris was noted in historical sources discussed above.

Evidence of human burial was recorded in the four eastern test pits: Test pits 2 and 2a on the site of the

memorial commemorating Greenwich pensioners, and Test Pits 3 and 4 in the area of the tennis courts. The burials lay within, or were sealed by a substantial layer of accumulated graveyard soil, containing post-medieval building debris.

Although *in situ* articulated burials were only clearly seen in Test pit 2, it is probable that some of the disarticulated bones found in the other test pits were intact burials disturbed by the machining of the test pits. The considerable accumulation of grave soil and the lack of visible grave cuts suggested that the area had been heavily used for burials (OA 1999a, 4). A similar density of burial was noted slightly further to the south on the site of the electrical substation (see below), suggesting particularly dense burial activity in the central part of the burial ground. Grave cuts were more clearly visible in Areas 1 and 2 following machining to a far greater depth.

No evidence of activity clearly pre-dating the Royal Hospital was identified, with the exception of a possible palaeochannel in Test pit 5.

Archaeological evaluation, November 1999

Four trenches (Trenches 10-13) were excavated within the footprint of the proposed Conference Facility and one (Trench 14) within the footprint of the proposed student accommodation block (Fig. 2). The description below is based on the evaluation report (OA 1999c). Trenches 10-13 lay within the areas which were excavated in 2001, and the results from these evaluation trenches are only briefly outlined. (For full details see the unpublished client report, OA 1999c). Trench 14 lay outside the excavation area, but was within the area investigated during a watching brief in February-March 2000 (see below).

Trench 10

Trench 10 measured 4.5 m by 4 m at ground level (8.35 m OD) and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.4 m (6.95 m OD) below the top of the trench. The trench was stepped to create a safe working area. An area 2.5 m by 3 m was investigated at the base of the trench. Natural gravel (1018) was identified at a depth of 7.18 m OD, 1.17 m below the top of the trench. Five WNW-ESE aligned grave cuts (1000, 1010, 1013, 1032 and 1045) were revealed cut into the natural.

The grave cuts had all been truncated prior to the laying of a concrete slab 1031, and the surviving skeletons were 0.10 m below this. The slab may have formed a courtyard for the Maritime Museum. Overlying this concrete were various rubble dumps sealed

by make-up layers (1067 and 1068) and the tarmac of the tennis court (1072).

Four graves (1000, 1023, 1032 and 1045) contained well preserved articulated adult skeletons and were filled with orange brown silty sand containing some ceramic building material (CBM) and interpreted as disturbed redeposited natural. A fifth grave (1010) was excavated no further than a layer of disarticulated charnel remains, presumably within the backfill of a further inhumation. Three skeletons were identified as adult males, and the fourth was adult, but of indeterminate sex. None of the skeletons displayed any obvious palaeopathology, and where present the teeth were in very good condition. This data has not been included in the osteological analysis presented Chapter 4. The skeletons and coffin fittings were left *in situ*, and the graves were covered with a cushioning layer of natural sand prior to backfilling of the trenches. Trench 10 was subsequently re-excavated as part of Area 1 in 2001.

Trenches 11 and 12

The two trenches were combined into a single excavation at surface level and stepped for safety because of the unstable deposits. An area 9 m by 4.5 m was excavated to natural gravel (1118) at a depth of 1.40 m below ground level. Trench 11 to the east and Trench 12 to the west both measured 2 m by 2.5 m, and were excavated to a maximum depth of 2.10 m below ground level (6.53 m OD).

In Trench 11, four grave cuts (1113-1116) were noted, graves 1113 and 1116 each containing a fully articulated skeleton and coffin fittings, and graves 1114-1115 each with two burials. All were backfilled with redeposited natural gravel. Grave 1113 contained an adult male, and grave 1116 a skeleton of indeterminate sex. Grave 1115 contained two adult skeletons, one male and one female. Grave 1114 also contained two skeletons, one an adult female, but second skeleton was obscured by the female skeleton. None of the skeletons exhibited obvious pathology. Trench 11 was re-excavated as part of Area 1 in 2001.

In Trench 12, two graves filled with redeposited natural were revealed. The redeposited natural was overlaid by a dark brown sandy silt with ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. Grave 1207 had no surviving skeleton. Grave 1204 contained a fully articulated adult female skeleton and coffin fittings, including coffin handles of Spitalfields type 2a (Reeve and Adams 1993), dating from 1763-1837, and a corroded illegible coffin plate. No palaeopathology was seen. The concrete surface (1122 and 1215) was 0.15 m above the shallowest inhumation, and was overlaid by a series of rubble dumps which in turn were overlaid by the tarmac tennis court (1209) and its make-up layers. Trench 12 was re-excavated as part of Area 2 in 2001.

Trench 13

The trench measured 4.5 m by 4.5 m at ground surface, stepping down to an area of 2 m by 2.5 m, and

excavated to a maximum depth of 1.89 m (6.70 m OD) below ground level. The natural gravel (1327) was observed at a depth of 7.10 m OD. No burials were seen in this trench, but deposits of animal bone were observed. The features seen consisted of several ditches and pits containing post-medieval pottery, filled with homogenous brown sandy silt, overlying natural gravels which had collapsed or slipped from the edges of cuts. The latest features were pit 1317, measuring c 2 m in diameter and 0.30 m in depth, and another pit (1315), which was 0.45 m deep and over 0.20 m wide. They truncated two linear ditches which were aligned north-south. Ditch 1312 measured 1.25 m wide and 0.36 m deep – it contained a sherd of Coarse Borderware AD 1350-1500, and this in turn cut away ditch 1320 measuring over 0.45 m wide and 0.26 m deep.

These features were overlain by a make-up layer (1310) of dark brown sandy, silt, with occasional CBM fragments and small rounded pebbles. Overlying this was a possible make-up layer (1308) of lighter brown silty sand. Make-up layers and the tarmac tennis court (1300) completed the sequence.

Trench 14

Trench 14 was located west of the other four trenches. The trench base measured 2 m by 2.5 m, with a step added for access. The trench was excavated to a depth of 2.10 m (6.43 m OD) below ground level, revealing the level of natural gravel (1421). No features were observed in the base of the trench, but cutting the gravel to this depth were a number of post-medieval pits and a foundation cut (1412). The earliest feature was a pit (1419) which was 1 m deep and 2.40 m wide, backfilled with various rubble and mortar layers. The pit cut away a crude brick built foundation (1410) one skin thick and 0.40 m high. The bricks were a dark red colour and measured 0.23 m by 0.11 m by 0.07 m. A pit (1405), 0.60 m deep and over 2.30 m wide truncated both these features. This was backfilled with two layers of orange brown clay silt sandwiching dark grey clay silt with 10% CBM. All the fills contained redeposited natural pebbles and gravel. This pit was partially removed by a pit (1407) 1 m deep and over 1 m wide, backfilled with dark grey clayey silt with 1% CBM and 2% rounded pebbles. Overlying these features was a possible garden soil (1401), 0.40m thick, made up of dark grey brown clayey silt loam with 5% CBM and 10% pebbles and gravel, in turn overlaid by the tarmac car park and concrete base (1400).

In summary

It was clear that only the lower part of the graves, including skeletons and coffin remains, survived. The upper parts of the graves, and any shallower graves that may have existed, had been truncated in preparation for laying a concrete yard surface in the 20th century. Neither the original depth of the graves, nor the height of the original ground surface could therefore be reconstructed with confidence. In parts of the

cemetery, it was evident that more than one skeleton occupied a single grave cut. Stacking of two burials on top of one another was noted, but there was no evidence for deeper stacking.

Inhumations were predominantly older adult males, presumably retired sailors or marines. Female burials were found within graves also containing the remains of an adult male, presumably their spouse. No sub adult remains were uncovered in this phase. The remnants of plain wooden coffins were present. These had been decorated with iron *departum* plates, most of which were severely corroded. Grave 1204 was the only grave with recognisable coffin handles. The simplicity of the coffins suggest that the burials in this area were of low-ranking men, perhaps ratings, and their families.

No earlier archaeological deposits was found below the graves, with the exception of a possible medieval ditch in Trench 13. This may have been part of a field boundary or garden feature associated with Greenwich Park. The post-medieval ditches from the same trench are interesting in that they may have served to define areas within the cemetery.

The crude brick wall in Trench 14, of which only a small remnant was found, is likely to be part of one of the buildings shown on the 1778 Map of the Hundred of Blackheath (Fig. 3). The buildings were not present on the 1695 map, and were probably demolished by 1783 prior to the construction of the hospital school infirmary (OA 1999b, 6). It appears that the wall was of 18th-century date. The area was much disturbed by later services, and south of the trench the existing building would have truncated most of the archaeology. Within the footprint of the proposed student accommodation block, the archaeological potential was therefore very limited.

Watching brief on site of student accommodation, February-March 2000 (Fig. 7)

Trench 15

Trench 15 was excavated in February and March 2000. In part, the trench was located within the footprint of the proposed student accommodation facing King William Walk, in the location of the demolished southern wing of the Devonport Building. In this phase, a watching brief on a drainage trench excavation was also undertaken. This extended south and west of the Devonport Building into the area lying immediately the south-west of Area 2 (Fig. 2). A hexagonal area (roughly measuring 2.5 x 2.8 m) was cleared to accommodate a manhole, and two graves (1564 and 1571), and a possible third grave cut (1568), were identified in the north-eastern area of the trench (Fig. 7). Graves 1564 and 1571 lay within the level of impact and the burials were removed. Grave 1571 (of Grave group 1570) cut the natural gravels (1518) and contained one coffined skeleton (1572). The upper part of the grave backfill (1573) was cut by the later grave 1564 (Grave group 1563), without disturbing the underlying skeleton. Grave 1564 contained coffined skeleton 1565. The absence of grave cuts to the

east of the three graves suggested that they may have marked out the western limit of the burial ground. Certainly, no burials were discovered between the manhole trench and King William Walk in any of the previous phases of archaeological works.

Within the footprint of the proposed student accommodation building and in the courtyard area to the west of the existing Devonport Building, a number of structures, drains and culverts were uncovered, which mostly related to that building. Pipe trenches 1502, 1507, 1523 and 1543 were recorded. Two brick-built culverts 1524 and 1534 were also identified. Thirteen brick-and-mortar wall foundations were located in different parts of the trench. On the basis of brick and mortar characteristics, all appeared to be either modern or later post-medieval in date. The foundations and/or the lower courses of walls 1505, 1508, 1511, 1524, 1527 and 1552 comprised modern brick (machine-made, stamped and/or frogged) that were bonded with hard, dark grey mortar or cement.

Six of the remaining foundations were later post-medieval in date (probably 18th- to 19th-century). These included north - south orientated wall foundation 1555 and north-west - south-east orientated wall foundation 1548 within the courtyard area facing onto King William Walk; wall 1531 in the area of the demolished south wing; north-west - south-east orientated walls 1556 and 1558 to the south-east of the south wing, and the surviving remnants of a north-west - south-east orientated wall variously numbered 1575, 1578, 1579 and 1577 located along the length of the service trench between the Infirmary building and Area 2.

Linear cut 1527 was vertical sided and flat based, at least 9.3 m in length and 1.8 m deep. It was filled with clay sand containing a high proportion of gravel and building rubble (1528). Its position on the perimeter of the site aligned on King William Walk suggested that this was the foundation for the outer perimeter wall of the Infirmary and graveyard.

Archaeological watching brief on site of conference facility, January-March 2000

Nothing of archaeological significance was revealed.

Archaeological excavation - Phase 1 the electrical substation, January 2000 (Fig. 8)

A trench measuring 3.6 m x 4.5 m was excavated following the demolition of a cycle shed in the area of the proposed substation. The trench was excavated to the impact level between 1.6 m and 2.4 m beneath the present ground surface. The natural geology (2002), a loose yellow gravelly soil, was cut by 26 approximately west-east orientated graves. The graves were closely packed and there was considerable intercutting of features (Fig. 8). The density of burials exceeded all other areas revealed during archaeological works. Interestingly, in Area 1 the greatest grave density and intercutting was discovered in the southern part of the trench (see below) and dense burial was also seen within watching brief on engineering

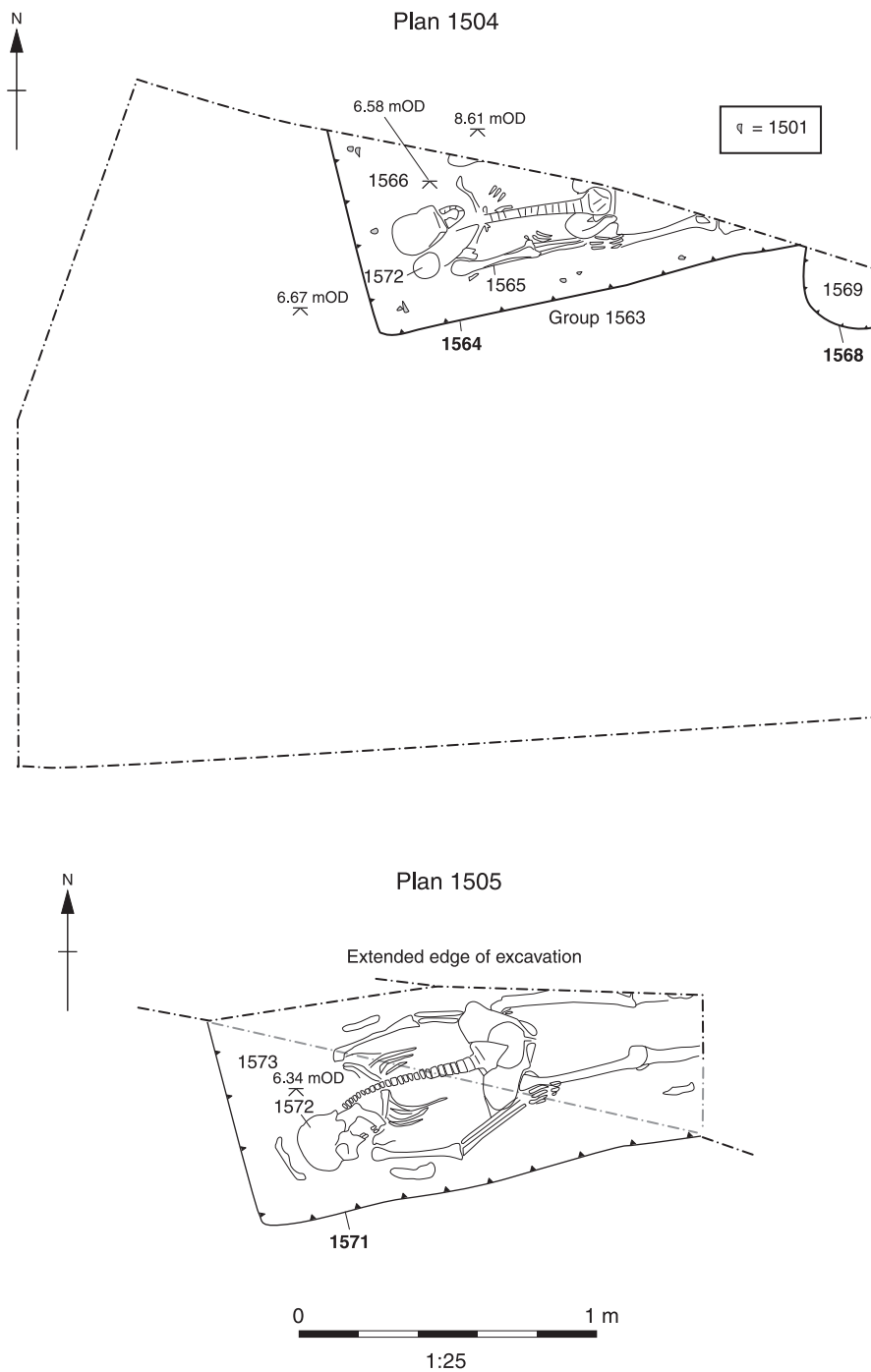


Figure 7 Trench 15: plan of burials 1565 and 1572.

test pit 2, which suggests that burial density across the whole site was greatest in the central part of the burial ground.

Proposed developments did not impact on the burials within the trench with the exception of skeleton 2005 (grave group 2003). Details of this burial are presented in Appendix 2. The skulls of two skeletons were visible at the western ends of grave groups 2010 and 2067, although the former was not discovered within the coffin stain (2012) and may have been

charnel from a disturbed grave. With the intercutting of so many graves, such charnel is inevitable. Disarticulated long bones of at least two individuals and a mandible were found dumped in the western end of grave 2025 (grave group 2024). This grave had cut at least five other graves, and this charnel probably originated from at least two of these features. Grave 2025 was in turn cut by grave group 2007.

The only non-burial feature to be excavated within the trench was a modern pit 2082 (diameter 1.7 m;

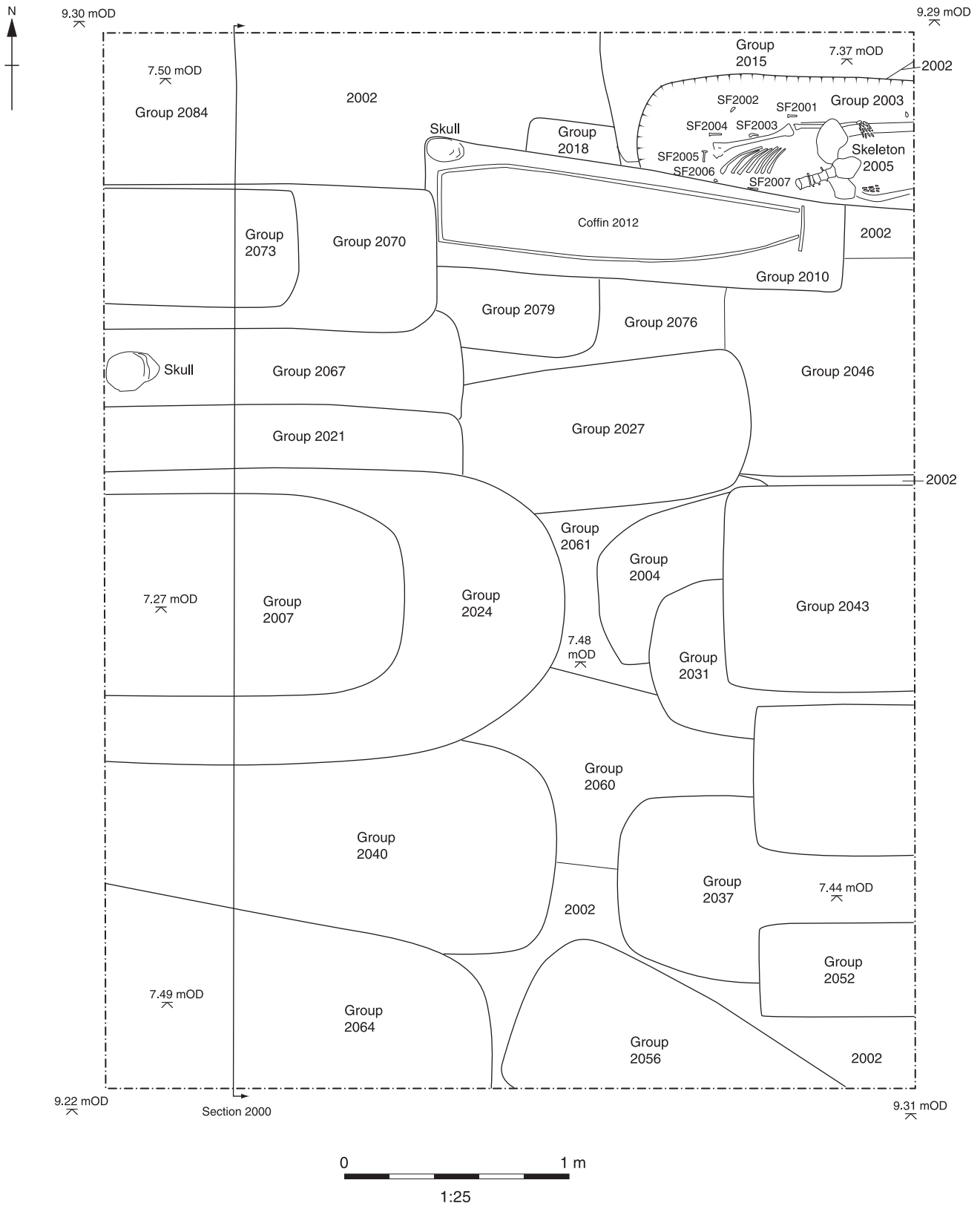


Figure 8 Electricity substation trench: plan of burial 2005.

depth 0.9 m). This not only truncated several grave fills but also cut the made ground (2001) and it was only overlaid by the modern tarmac and a levelling layer 2000. The tarmac and levelling, together with a layer of building debris (2001) sealed the graves. Pit 2082 contained a grey black sandy-clay (2083) with inclusions of slag and scrap metal.

Archaeological excavation - Phase 2 Areas 1 and 2, June-September 2001 (Figs 9-12)

Areas 1 and 2 lay within the footprint of the conference facility (Fig. 2), in a location previously used as tennis courts. Machine stripping revealed graves over the whole of both areas (Plates 13-14). At least 104 grave cuts were visible in Area 1 (Fig. 11) and 60 in Area 2 (Fig. 12).

The natural geology (3000) comprised river gravels in a matrix of loose red-yellow sand. This layer was encountered approximately 1.6 m below the present ground surface. In Area 1 it was sealed by dark grey brown silty sand (3005), approximately 0.4 m in depth, interpreted as a graveyard soil. The graves cut layer 3005 and the natural gravels. The graves were sealed by four layers of made ground (3002, 3003, 3004 and 3011), and by a levelling layer and modern tarmac (3001) (Fig. 9).

Building rubble within these layers probably originated from the demolition and construction of buildings in the vicinity. Eyewitness accounts described the burial ground as being in a disreputable state because demolition debris thrown there during construction of the School Infirmary in the 1770s and 1780s. The area was subsequently landscaped. Layer 3184 was located in the southern central part of Area 1 and extended into Area 2 as layer 6049. Layer 3184 was 0.4 m deep and comprised bands of orange sand (natural) and dark brown silty sand (cemetery soil), and included much disarticulated human bone

(c. 10%). It was noted that the upper levels of many graves were truncated over this area, and the layer and associated truncation is interpreted as evidence of the landscaping work. A similar deposit sequence was present within Area 2 (Fig. 10). Layer 6049 was overlaid by graveyard soil 6048 (equivalent to 3005, Fig. 9), which in turn was covered by made ground (6043-6047) and tarmac (6042). (In Figure 10 layer 6049 seals grave 6032 and its fill 6033.)

Burials

Only graves that would be disturbed by piling were excavated. Sixteen piling trenches were located in Area 1 (Fig. 11, T3000-T3015) and 13 in Area 2 (Fig. 12, T6000-T6015). A total of 55 grave cuts containing 104 skeletons were excavated. (Each excavated grave and grave group is described in Appendix 2.) A small quantity of CBM, pottery, clay pipe, glass and a few metal objects were recovered from features. These appeared to have been residual. Specialist reports on artefacts are in Appendices 6 to 10.

The graves were not orientated on the west-east axis so common in Christian burial sites, but were aligned SW-NE at right angles to the long axis of the southern wall of the Devonport Building, and parallel to King William Walk. This suggests that the desire for a neatly laid out graveyard took precedence over burial conventions. Similarly, at the Royal Hospital Haslar, Gosport, Hants., burials were orientated with the NE-SW alignment of the buildings and walls of the hospital, and not W-E as would be expected in a Christian cemetery (Boston 2005).

A similar desire for order was expressed in the northern half of Area 1 and in Area 2, with graves arranged in neat rows, with broadly even spacing between them. It would appear that the locations of these burials were marked above ground. Indeed, a

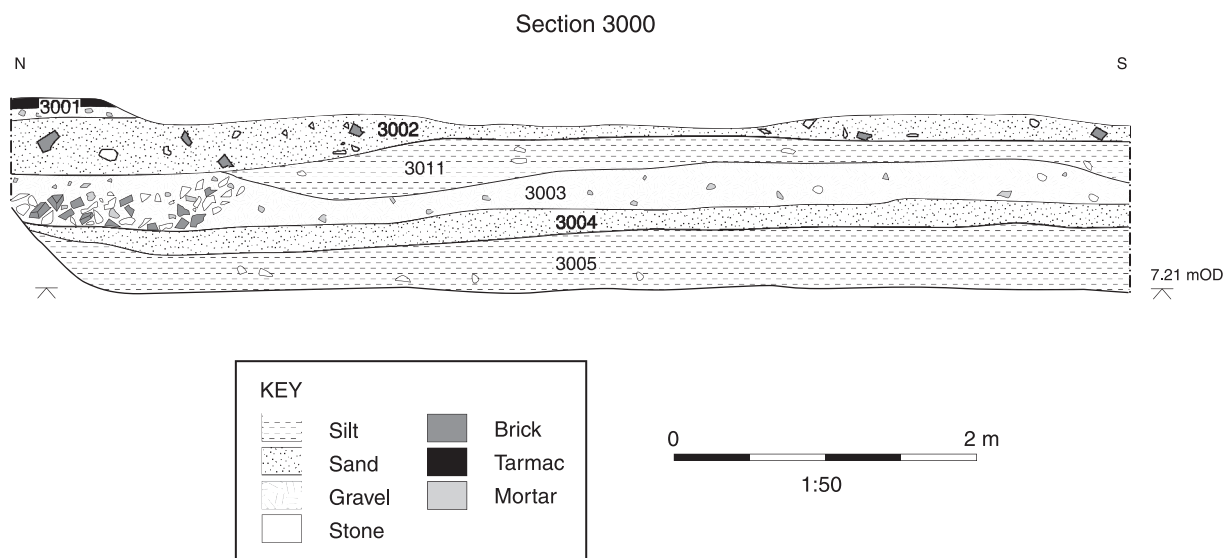


Figure 9 Area 1- west-facing section at north end of trench.

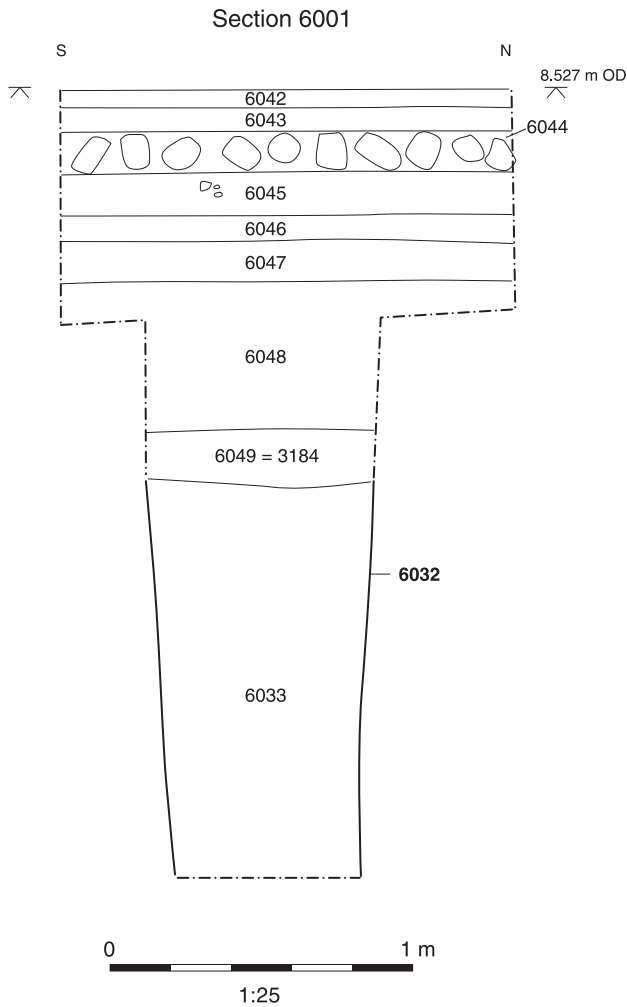


Figure 10 Area 2- east-facing section with grave 6032.

few headstones were present until destroyed in the Blitz. Records of some inscriptions are held by the National Archives, Kew. In the south-western part of Area 1, the regular organisation of earlier graves in rows may be discerned, but many of these were cut or overlaid by later burials, resulting in considerably more truncation of the skeletons. The densest area of intercutting was within the southern part of the trench as noted above.

All the excavated graves were bottomed. Many graves contained multiple interments. The number of inhumations per grave varied from one to six, a mean of three burials per grave (Plate 15).

The vast majority of skeletons were male, but five females, and two possible females and two adolescents (skeleton 3132 aged 12–14 years, and skeleton 3249 aged 16–18 years) were also excavated (Chapter 4, Palaeodemography). A single infant burial was identified but not removed. Most of the remains were males older than 40 years. Thus, the assemblage appeared to have been comprised almost exclusively of pensioners. Assuming that the females of the assemblage were spouses, it is reasonable to suppose that they would be interred within the same grave

as their husbands. This was not necessarily the case, however. Female skeleton 3072 was the last of four vertically stacked burials in grave group 3450. The other three burials were elderly males, one of whom may well have been her husband. In grave group 6150, two pairs of skeletons were buried one above the other. Skeleton 6027 was a possible woman buried as one of a pair with male skeleton 6053, but overlaying male skeleton 6056. It is uncertain whether the man next to her or beneath her was her spouse, or indeed, whether either was her husband. The remaining three females (skeletons 3174, 3245 and 6132) and possible female (skeleton 3223) were each individually interred. It is impossible to know whether males in the adjacent graves were their spouses, however. Married couples could not be identified from spatial relations with any degree of confidence.

No difference in burial treatment was accorded to the two adolescents. Skeleton 3132 (aged 12–14 years) was the earliest of three burials within grave group 3410, being overlaid by two older males. An older adolescent 3249 was interred in grave group 3250 above skeleton 3255 (a 35–40 year old male). Like the female burials, it is impossible to know whether these sub adults were related to the other burials within the grave. In the case of group 3410, there were no non-metric traits present that would suggest a familial relationship between skeletons 3249 and 3255. Skeleton 3132 was not analysed for non-metric traits, being too immature, and hence, no osteological evidence exists to suggest a father-child relationship in either case.

Dark staining of the backfill of many graves, remnants of wood within the graves and the presence of iron fixing nails and coffin fittings were associated with 86 burials, indicating that most, if not all of the deceased had been coffined. Where the coffin stain was well preserved, the single break shape could clearly be seen (Plate 29). No legible breastplates were present, and hence, the individual identity of the deceased remains unknown. The coffins and fittings are consistent with working class burials of the time, but were considerably more ornate than those of the Haslar Hospital burial ground, Gosport (Boston 2005). The coffins and fittings are discussed more fully in Chapter 5 below and the fittings summarised in Appendix 4.

Within the graves, the lack of clothes fastenings, such as buttons, toggles or buckles, suggested that the dead had been laid out in shrouds rather than in their personal clothes (in keeping with the prevailing custom in civilian burial). A few copper alloy pins, verdigris staining on the skeletons and the occasional scraps of textile all support this interpretation (Appendix 5).

Non-grave features in Area 1

A limited number of non-grave features were discovered during the excavation of Areas 1 and 2, including the foundations of structures, ditches and pits. Most were post-medieval or modern, post-dating the burials.

A rectangular flat based feature (3233) measuring 0.6 m x 0.56 m, was interpreted as a small charnel pit. It contained the pelvis and femora of possible female adult (3232). This feature was truncated by grave cut 3114 (group 3490).

A similar rectangular feature with vertical sides and a flat base (measuring 0.23 m x 0.63 m x 0.11 m) had been dug into the natural gravels (3000) in the eastern end of grave 3215 (group 4090). It contained part of a skull and a right humerus, which was assigned to possible female skeleton 3223.

Also in the south-eastern part of Area 1 was a large area of modern truncation 3147, which was not fully excavated but which extended 12 m in a north-south direction at an acute angle to the southern wall of the Devonshire Building. Its maximum extent in Area 1 was 13 m wide and 1.1 m deep. It remains uncertain if it comprised a single or several cuts. This modern disturbance cut through modern overburden and partly truncated all the graves in the area. It was backfilled with modern building debris (3146).

The foundation trench (3625) and the southern wall of the Devonport Buildings (3626) truncated a number of the south-eastern burials, including groups 3620, 3550 and 3560, removing the lower parts of the skeletons.

Non-grave features in Area 2

A north-south ditch (6008, 6122 and 6124) was found within the northern part of Area 2. This was a shal-

low feature cutting the natural gravels (3000), but was overlain with graveyard soil (3045) and modern levelling layers and tarmac. Along its length it was truncated by at least three graves (6002 (group 6020), 6026 (group 6150), and unexcavated grave group 6090), and clearly predated them. The ditch ranged in depth from 0.2 m to 0.32 m, becoming shallower towards the south. It appears to have been truncated altogether south of the above interventions. The ditch varied in width from 0.52 m to 0.7 m. In profile, it had moderately sloping sides and a flat base. Its single fill (variously 6007, 6123 and 6125) contained little to date the feature, but a tile fragment of late post-medieval date, which may itself be residual.

One foundation trench (6139) containing the base of a brick and mortar wall was revealed in the south-western part of Area 2. The remains of the wall survived to four courses. The bricks were red, orange and yellow (measuring 96 mm x 211 mm x 61 mm) bonded by lime mortar in English and Flemish bonds. The total eastern extent of the structure was revealed within the trench (measuring 7.02 m long and 0.6 m in width). The return of the wall towards the west was seen at its northern and southern extent. The function of this structure is not understood.

A number of modern service trenches and soakaways crossed the site truncating burials. Pipe trench 6006 in the western part of the trench truncated burials 6110, 6210, 6250, 6340 and 6560. Modern brick built soakaways with associated drains were also present in this area (6005 and 6107).