

Chapter 1: Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Mount Anvil, on behalf of the University of Greenwich, to prepare a desk-based assessment and undertake detailed archaeological fieldwork at Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich, London, in advance of the construction of a conference facility, student accommodation and an electricity substation (OAU 1995; OA 1999a; OA 1999b; OA 1999c). The development was sited within the precincts of the 18th- to 19th-century burial ground of the Royal Hospital Greenwich (Fig. 1; see also Fig. 2), and included the demolition of the existing southern wing of the Devonport Building (built in 1882). The archaeological works included an evaluation, excavations and watching briefs, which were carried out between July 1999 and September 2001.

Archaeological investigations were undertaken in a number of phases, which are listed in Table 1. The results of each phase of works are discussed within this document.

The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a number of Written Schemes of Investigation (WSIs) prepared by OA and approved by English Heritage's Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS). The watching brief on engineering test pits undertaken in July 1999 formed the first stage of archaeological assessment of the proposed development area. This was followed by a desk-based assessment, which in turn was followed by further phases of archaeological investigation, which comprised evaluation, excavations and watching briefs. The locations of all areas of archaeological intervention are shown in Figure 2.

Geology and location

The development area is located in the south-western corner of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, London,

Table 1 *Devonport Buildings - phases of archaeological work.*

Type of archaeological work	Date
Watching brief - Engineering test pits	July 1999
Desk based assessment	October 1999
Evaluation	November 1999
Watching brief - Student Accommodation	January-March 2000
Excavation of electricity sub-station	January 2000
Excavation of Areas 1 and 2	June-September 2001

beside the Devonport Buildings (NGR TQ 3850 7760) (Fig. 1) and sited on Quaternary Floodplain Gravel (BGS 1981, Sheet 271).

The two proposed buildings cover an area of c. 580 m² bounded by King William Walk to the south-west, by the National Maritime Museum to the east, by Romney Road to the north-west and by Greenwich Park to the south-east (Fig. 1). The River Thames lies approximately 350 m to the north of the site. The Royal Naval College lies opposite the Hospital on the northern side of Romney Road. The site of the smaller proposed building (the student accommodation) was occupied by a part of the Devonport Buildings, which subsequently was demolished. The site of the conference facility had been used as tennis courts until redevelopment. An upstanding stone memorial commemorating the naval pensioners buried within the cemetery is located in a grassed area to the south of the proposed conference facility.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

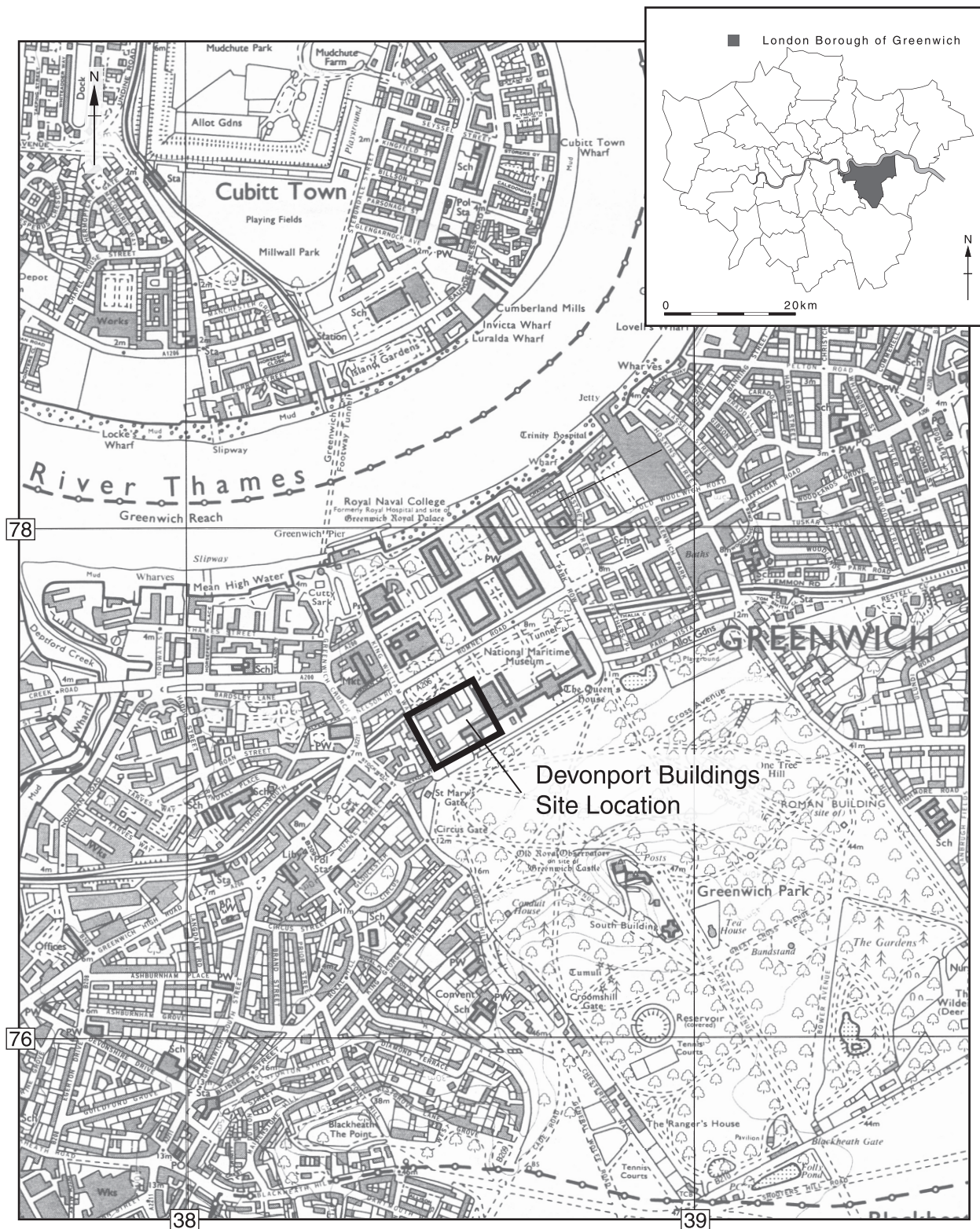
Introduction

No archaeological investigations had been carried out within the proposed development area prior to the work undertaken by OA. The following background information relating to the site is derived from the desk-based assessment (OA 1999), which summarises the known archaeological discoveries within a study area measuring 1.5 km square centred on the proposed development. The study area has in the past seen several archaeological investigations, including watching briefs, evaluation trenches, open-area excavations and surveys.

Prehistoric period

Numerous artefacts, including Mesolithic and Neolithic worked flints and Bronze Age weapons, have been retrieved from the southern foreshore of the River Thames beside the Royal Hospital in the latter half of the 20th century. These discoveries indicate the presence of prehistoric activity within the general area of the development.

Greenwich Park, c.550 m to the south-east of the proposed development, contains a Bronze Age barrow cemetery comprising approximately 50 round barrows. A geophysical and earthwork survey carried out by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in 1993-4 identified 31 barrows but was unable to determine the full extent of the cemetery.



Scale 1:10,000

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Figure 1 Site location.

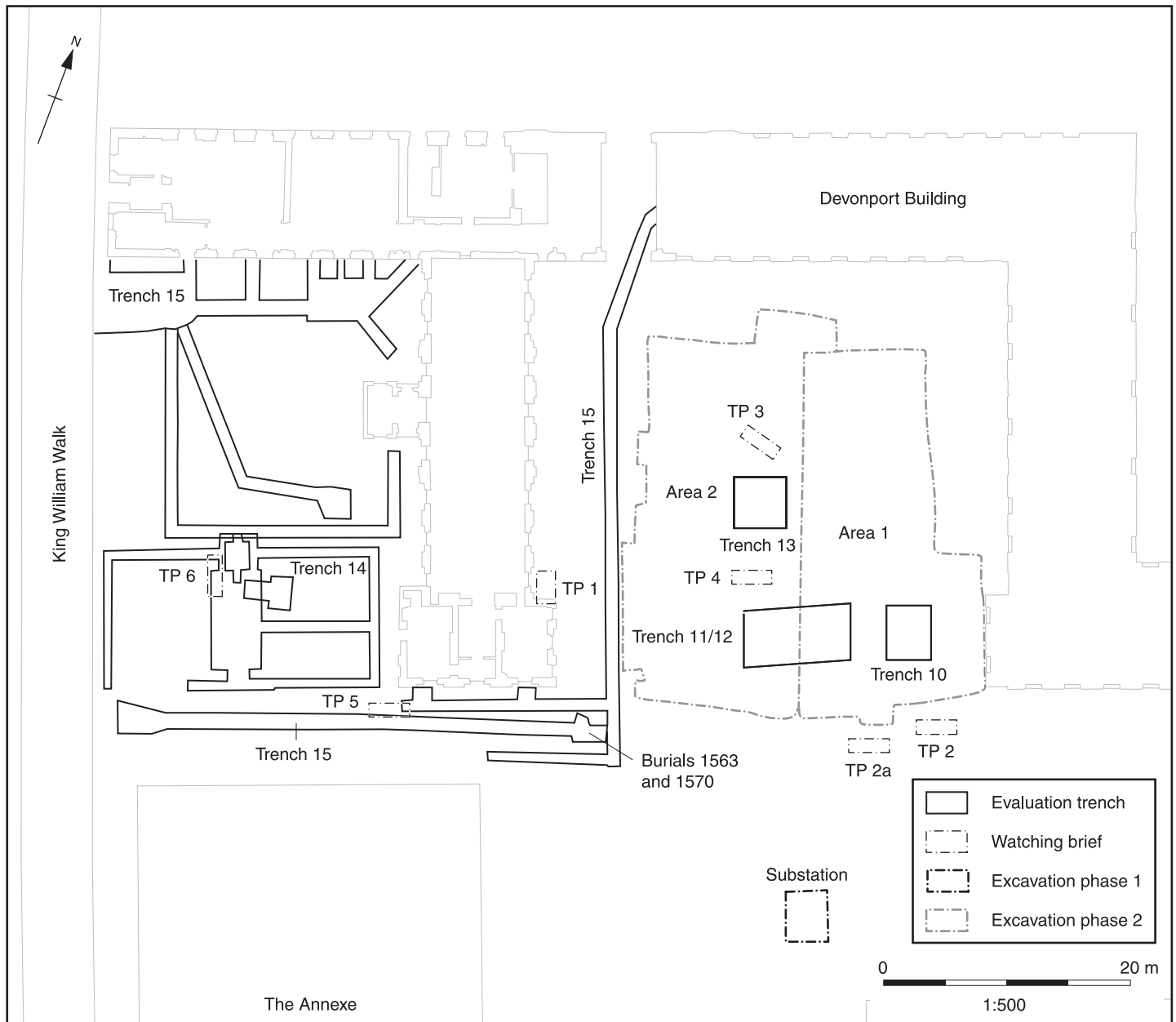


Figure 2 Location of excavation, evaluation and watching brief trenches.

Roman period

In the grounds of the Royal Naval College, Roman remains were found under the hospital before 1928, but no further information is provided in the sources consulted and the exact location of the site is not known. In a nearby residential property c. 450 m north-east of the development site, in the immediate vicinity of the college, foundations of a Roman building were found 'some years ago' (before 1990). Three sherds of Roman pottery were found in the latter half of the 19th century c. 150 m to the south-west of the development.

In 1902, a possible Romano-British temple was discovered within Greenwich Park, c. 750 m south-east of the development. Over 400 Roman coins were found. There were further excavations in 1978-79 when the

remains of an earlier Roman rectangular building (possibly a villa) were revealed beneath the temple. The earlier building, dating to c. AD 100, had been destroyed by fire and the temple built on the site soon afterwards. Geophysical survey, undertaken as part of the RCHME's park survey in 1993, failed to produce any additional evidence for the nature and extent of the site.

Isolated Roman finds in the vicinity discovered at various times over the last hundred years, include a bronze bowl and a coffin from within Greenwich Park, c. 450 m to the south-east of the development site, and a Roman helmet and bronze box possibly of Roman date, which were found on the Thames foreshore c. 450 m to the north of the site. These sites and finds indicate clear evidence of Roman activity in the area around the development site.

Early medieval period (to AD 1066)

In 1860, four inhumation burials with grave goods were found at the 'Old Tilt Yard', c. 250 m to the north-east of the area of development. One of the graves was probably of 7th-century date. A further skeleton, possibly Saxon in date, was found c. 100 m to the east of these burials in 1979. The burials indicate the presence of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery, the size and extent of which is unknown.

Excavations c. 600 m to the south-east conducted by Hearne in 1714 and by Douglas in 1784, revealed early medieval inhumation burials, some in coffins and buried with grave goods. The distance between these burials and the burials within the 'Old Tilt Yard' would suggest that these finds were not parts of the same cemetery but represent two separate burial grounds.

The first documentary mention of Greenwich was in AD 964, when Elstrudis, daughter of King Alfred the Great, donated considerable property in Greenwich to the Abbey at Ghent. The place-name Greenwich - 'Grenavic' - is derived from the Anglo-Saxon for 'green port'. The Domesday Book lists arable land, pasture, woodland and four mills attached to the manor, which was held by the Bishop of Lisieux of Bishop Odo of Bayeux.

Later medieval period (AD 1066–1550)

In 1268 the manor of Greenwich was held by the Abbot of Ghent. Documentary sources suggest that the Abbot's land holding was a monastic grange. Excavation in 1970-1 within the Grand Square c. 300 m north-east of the site revealed the remains of a rectangular building, which may have formed part of the grange. This 14th-century building probably had two floors and was a part-chalk/limestone and part-timber structure. The Abbot of Ghent's lands at Greenwich returned to Royal hands in 1414 when King Henry V suppressed Alien Priorities during the war with France.

The Duke of Gloucester built Greenwich Palace on the site of the earlier manor between 1433 and 1439. He also constructed a castle to the south, on the site of the present Royal Observatory, and enclosed the surrounding deer park. The Royal Palace comprised two courts and a hedged garden. It was enlarged and rebuilt in the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII (Colvin 1982, 97) and was one of the main royal palaces during the 16th century. A Franciscan friary was established on land beside the palace in 1485. It is believed that remains of the friary survive beneath the King's House.

Post-medieval period (AD 1550 +)

The area of development lies outside the Tudor palace complex which is located c. 300 m to the east and north-east. In the 17th century, the Tudor palace was demolished to make way for a new palace. Based on the designs of John Webb, the building of the new royal palace at Greenwich (the King's House) was commissioned after 1661, but due to lack of funds

the palace was never completed. In 1692 Christopher Wren was commissioned to convert the unfinished building into a naval hospital.

The need for a hospital and retirement home for disabled and aged seamen of the Royal Navy had long been recognised by the Admiralty. In the 1666, Samuel Pepys wrote of a proposal to build such an establishment at Chatham (Latham 2000, 134). This plan was never realised, and it was some three decades before a hospital was founded at Greenwich on land adjacent to the existing Royal Palace, and east of the borough of Greenwich itself. The Royal Hospital was established by a Royal Charter dated 1694. The hospital took in its first pensioners in 1705.

Originally founded for 100 seamen, demand was such that between 1811 and 1814 the accommodation was enlarged and the maximum number of 'in-pensioners' was fixed at 2,710 (Lewis 1960, 415). The hospital was to become one of the grandest, largest and best loved institutions of its time, and to every seaman of Nelson's day, the word 'hospital' meant first and foremost, one thing- the Royal Hospital at Greenwich (*ibid.*, 414) (Plate 1).

PROJECT AIMS

Archaeological desk-based assessment, October 1999

The aims of the desk based assessment were as follows:

- To clarify the extent of the Royal Hospital Burial grounds (the site does not fall within an extension of St Alphege's Church cemetery as previously believed);
- Determine the extent of the disturbance by modern activity including construction of the railway tunnel c. 50 m to the north in the 1870s, and the construction of the Devonport Buildings (the Dreadnought Hospital Nurses Home) immediately north of the proposed sites in 1926-9
- Clarify the history and location of earlier buildings in the area of the proposed development site and its immediate vicinity in particular known archaeology associated with the early medieval manor and the later medieval palace.

The desk based assessment concluded that the proposed development site had a high potential to contain multi-period remains dating from the pre-historic to post-medieval periods, although no such sites or finds were located during the OA watching brief of geo-technical test pits in July 1999. The site is located on one of the few areas of gravelly ground beside the river's edge, which would have provided well-drained land conducive to early settlement. The study area contains evidence of activity dating from the pre-historic to post-medieval periods and the location and nature of these finds is discussed above.

It was further concluded that any archaeological deposits in the area and pre-dating the burial ground were likely to have been truncated by post-medieval

grave digging. The extent of the damage to archaeological deposits was uncertain and it was thought possible that archaeological features such as the bottoms of ditches cut into the natural ground might have survived. It was possible therefore that the construction of the foundations for the proposed buildings might have an impact on surviving archaeological deposits.

Archaeological evaluation, November 1999

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

- 1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the development area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality, date and depth below ground surface of any archaeological remains.
- 2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
- 3 To define the research potential, prioritise importance, and to determine corresponding minimum levels of data collection required to explore the demographic structure of the cemetery population; burial rite and undertaking practices; skeletal palaeopathology; topographic structure and development of the cemetery.
- 4 If significant archaeological remains are discovered, to determine what further mitigation measures may be required and to agree these with Mount Anvil, the local planning authority and English Heritage.
- 5 To make available the results of the investigation, in the form of a written report.

Archaeological watching briefs on the sites of the proposed student accommodation, conference facility, and on the site of the electricity substation, January–March 2000

The aims of the watching briefs were as follows:

- 1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the area of the proposed substation and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality, date, depth below ground surface and depth of any archaeological remains present within the sites of both the proposed student accommodation and the substation.
- 2 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the area of the proposed substation.
- 3 To define the research potential, prioritize importance, and to determine corresponding minimum levels of data collection required to explore the demographic structure of the cemetery population; burial rites and undertaking practices; skeletal palaeopathology; topographic structure and development of the cemetery.
- 4 To make available the results of the investigation.
- 5 To recover evidence of pre-cemetery activities and to consider these in the context of the urban development of Greenwich.

Archaeological excavation Areas 1 and 2, June–September 2001

The aims of the preceding phases of archaeological investigation were refined in advance of the excavation. The specific excavation aims are detailed below:

- 1 To collect data, which will contribute to the understanding of the history and development of funeral trends.
- 2 To collect data which will contribute to the understanding of the demography of the small percentage of the population of the graveyard that is being disturbed.
- 3 To establish the stratigraphic sequence of burials.
- 4 To provide dating evidence for the surviving burials.
- 5 To recover evidence of burial rites and undertaking practices.
- 6 To determine the character and date range of the burials.
- 7 To recover evidence for the management of the graveyard through time.
- 8 To recover evidence of coffins and coffin furniture.
- 9 To recover evidence for the treatment of the dead.
- 10 To identify individuals with biographical information from coffin plates.

FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The archaeological work at the Royal Hospital Greenwich involved a watching brief on test pits, an archaeological evaluation, a watching brief and excavation on the sites of the electricity substation and student accommodation, and excavation of Areas 1 and 2 within the footprint of the proposed conference facility. The site description below summarises the findings in these phases, but concentrates on the areas where the skeletons were exhumed. A description of each excavated grave is presented as Appendix 2.

Site procedures were in accordance with the requirements of the *OA Field Manual* (Wilkinson 1992), and the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service's Guidance Paper No. 3, *Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork in London*. Detailed recording of burial evidence was as specified in the *OA Field Manual* (Wilkinson 1992), the *MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual*, Section 3.5 'Recording and excavation of skeletons and coffins: Introduction', and in IFA Technical Paper No. 13, *Excavation and post-excavation treatment of cremated and inhumed human remains* (McKinley and Roberts 1993).

Archaeological watching brief, July 1999 (Fig. 2, TP1-2, 2a-6)

Seven engineering test pits were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothed bucket.

The trenches were excavated to a common width of 1.0 m but varied in length from 2.0-3.4 m. Depth of excavation was dependent on the revealed deposits and the level of the natural sand/gravel. Their depth precluded any manual cleaning or close visual examination of revealed deposits. Within these constraints, it was possible to produce reasonably accurate records of the stratigraphy. Artefacts were recorded but not retained. The excavation method and the ground conditions meant that it was extremely difficult to distinguish between hitherto undisturbed graves, and scatters of redeposited human bone.

Archaeological evaluation November 1999 (Fig. 2, Trenches 10-14)

Four trenches (Trenches 10-13) measuring 2.5 m by 2 m were located within the footprint of the proposed conference facility and a single trench (Trench 14) of similar dimensions was located within the footprint of the proposed student accommodation buildings. The overburden was removed by mechanical excavator down to the top of archaeological deposits, burials or natural, whichever was the highest. All further investigation was by hand. The skeletons were exposed, cleaned, assessed, planned and photographed, but not lifted.

Archaeological watching briefs on the sites of the proposed student accommodation, conference facility, and on the site of the electricity substation, January-March 2000 (Fig. 2, Trench 15 & Substation)

An archaeological watching brief (Trench 15) was carried out in the area of the proposed student accommodation (c. 22 m x 10 m) and associated services and in the area of the proposed electrical substation close to the Maritime Museum.

The area of the proposed substation had not been accessible at the time of the 1999 evaluation as it was then located beneath a bicycle shed. The trench measured 3.36 m x 4.05 m with deep foundations (see Fig. 8). It was anticipated that some skeletons would have to be excavated and removed, but that those burials not suffering direct impact from the new construction would be left *in situ*. As with previous phases, the location of grave groups and surface

features (such as coffin wood and human remains) would be planned.

Archaeological excavation Areas 1 and 2, June-September 2001 (Fig. 2, Areas 1 & 2)

Areas 1 and 2 lay within the footprint of the proposed conference facility. Excavation of archaeological features (principally graves) was carried out in designated areas where piling would impact on the archaeological deposits. A total of 29 pile locations of three different sizes (single, double and triple) were investigated (trenches 3000-3015 in Area 1, and trenches 6000-6012 in Area 2). Their locations are shown on Figures 11 and 12. The ground level was reduced until the grave cuts were visible. The locations of the pile trenches were surveyed using an EDM, and marked on the ground.

Any burials lying within or partly within the pile excavation areas were subjected to full excavation. All graves cutting or cut by the grave within the piling trench were also fully excavated. Samples for stomach contents were taken from approximately 25% of the burials. Wooden coffins and any associated fittings, including nails, were recorded on a proforma coffin recording sheet. All surviving coffin fittings were recorded in detail where possible by reference to the published corpus of material from Christ Church, Spitalfields (Reeve and Adams 1998) as well as the unpublished catalogue of material from St Nicholas, Sevenoaks, Kent (Boyle 1995).

All inhumation burials were assigned group numbers. These are shown on the plans (Figs 11-12). Each individual context (eg. grave cut, fill, skeleton and coffin) within the burial group was assigned a unique number from a continuous running sequence. Detailed works, comprising 100% excavation, and geo-referenced photography were undertaken for all inhumation burials. All inhumations were returned to the premises of Oxford Archaeology for processing and assessment.

Bulk soil samples were taken from all graves for the recovery of charred plant remains, human and animal bone and small artefacts.

All discrete non-burial features were excavated and planned at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. Generally, features were fully excavated, although those of low archaeological significance were half-sectioned. Standard black and white and colour photographs of each feature were taken.