



**ST JOHN AMBULANCE HALL, NORTH SQUARE,
DORCHESTER, DORSET
Archaeological Observations of
Structural Engineer's Test Pits**

Prepared on behalf of:

**Signpost Housing Association Ltd
Signpost House
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St John Ambulance Hall, North Square, Dorchester, Dorset Archaeological Observations, March 2000

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following the archaeological evaluation of the St John Ambulance Hall site in February 2000 (Terrain Archaeology Report 5058.1), an arrangement was reached with Malcolm Wright, the structural engineer, that the engineers test pits would reuse the archaeological evaluation trenches. As Trenches 3 and 4 on the eastern side of the site were not bottomed, it was agreed that any further excavation in these would be under archaeological supervision.
- 1.2 The groundworks comprised of the partial re-excavation of Trench 2 and the further excavation of Trench 4 (Figure 1). In addition, a small investigation was carried out in the rear of St John House, 1&2 Orchard Street. The fieldwork was carried out on 15th March 2000.
- 1.3 The archaeological works were funded by Signpost Housing Association Ltd. Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Helen Martland of Signpost Housing Association Ltd, Mrs N. Fergusson of St. John Ambulance, and Malcolm Wright of Malcolm Wright Partnership for their cooperation and assistance during this project. The observations and report are by Peter Bellamy.

2 RESULTS

2.1 Trench 2

- 2.1.1 The north-eastern quadrant of the trench was re-excavated. No new *in situ* archaeological deposits were disturbed.

2.2 Trench 4

- 2.2.1 Trench 4 was dug on the eastern side of the site. It measured 1 m by 1 m across and was initially dug to a depth of about 1.2 m during the evaluation. The backfill was emptied out and excavation continued down to a depth of 1.5 m. At this point excavation was continued down to a depth of 2.0 m in a small sondage in the southeast quadrant of the trench. Below this depth a probe was used to try to find the level of the chalk bedrock.

Stratigraphic sequence

- 2.2.2 The following stratigraphic sequence was exposed in the trench:

<i>depth</i>	<i>description</i>	<i>context nos</i>
0 – 0.1 m	topsoil	250
0.1 – 0.55 m	20th century deposits	251
0.55 – 1.6 m	19th century deposits	252 – 256
1.6 – 3.4 m	earlier deposits	257 - 259
c. 3.4 m	chalk bedrock	

Natural deposits

2.2.3 Chalk bedrock was not exposed in this trench. However, the approximate depth of the surface of the natural chalk was established using a probe. This proved to be at a depth of 3.4 m below the surface, ie. approximately 59.70 m above OD.

Pre-19th century deposits

2.2.4 The lower part of the sequence was not exposed so the nature of this stratigraphy remains in doubt.

2.2.5 The upper part of the sequence comprised a layer of a mid grey brown silty clay loam with moderate to frequent small chalk lumps (259), above which was a 0.3 m thick layer of hard-packed flint nodules with occasional chalk lumps and sparse fragments of Ham Hill stone in a mid grey brown silty clay matrix (258). Overlying this was a 0.1 m thick layer of mid grey brown silty clay loam with some flint rubble (257). No finds were recovered, so the date of these contexts is not known. The hard-packed flint nodules may be structural, though there was no

19th century deposits

2.2.6 The deposits described above were covered by a fairly hard-packed layer of dark brown clay loam with frequent chalk and mortar flecks (256). Cutting into this layer was a subrectangular post-hole (255) 0.55 m across, filled with dark grey brown clay loam (254) with frequent stone rubble surrounding a void post-pipe 0.2 m in diameter. Late 19th century pottery was recovered from this feature which may be the remains of a fencepost.

2.2.7 Above post-hole 255 was a 0.65 m thick deposit of dark brown soils (252, 253) with moderate flint and stone rubble, which produced late 19th century pottery. This layer may be associated with landscaping following the construction of Orchard Street.

20th century deposits

2.2.8 Above the 19th century soils described above, was a 0.45 m thick layer of loose brown sandy loam (251) with many tips and lenses of orange brown sand and gravel, crushed chalk, and brick rubble. This layer is probably associated with the construction of St John Ambulance Hall.

Topsoil

2.2.9 The topsoil was a 0.1 m thick layer of dark brown sandy loam with frequent flint gravel (250).

2.3 St John House

2.3.1 Probing and augering in a test hole in the rear of St John House revealed approximately one metre of dark brown clay loam above natural chalk. The chalk bedrock was at an approximate height of 62.08 m above OD.

3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The observations have revealed the existence of *in situ* archaeological deposits below 1.6 m of 19th and 20th century soils on the eastern part of the site. Unfortunately the nature of the investigations means that it is almost impossible to interpret these deposits on present evidence. The great depth at which the chalk bedrock was encountered in Trench 4 suggests that the trench might have been located above a feature, perhaps a pit or ditch, cut into the

chalk. The fact that the natural chalk was encountered at a height about 1.3 m above this level, further down slope in the rear of St John House lends credence to this hypothesis.

4 REFERENCES

Terrain Archaeology, 2000 St John Ambulance Site, North Square, Dorchester, Dorset:
Archaeological Evaluation. Report No: 5038.1, February 2000.

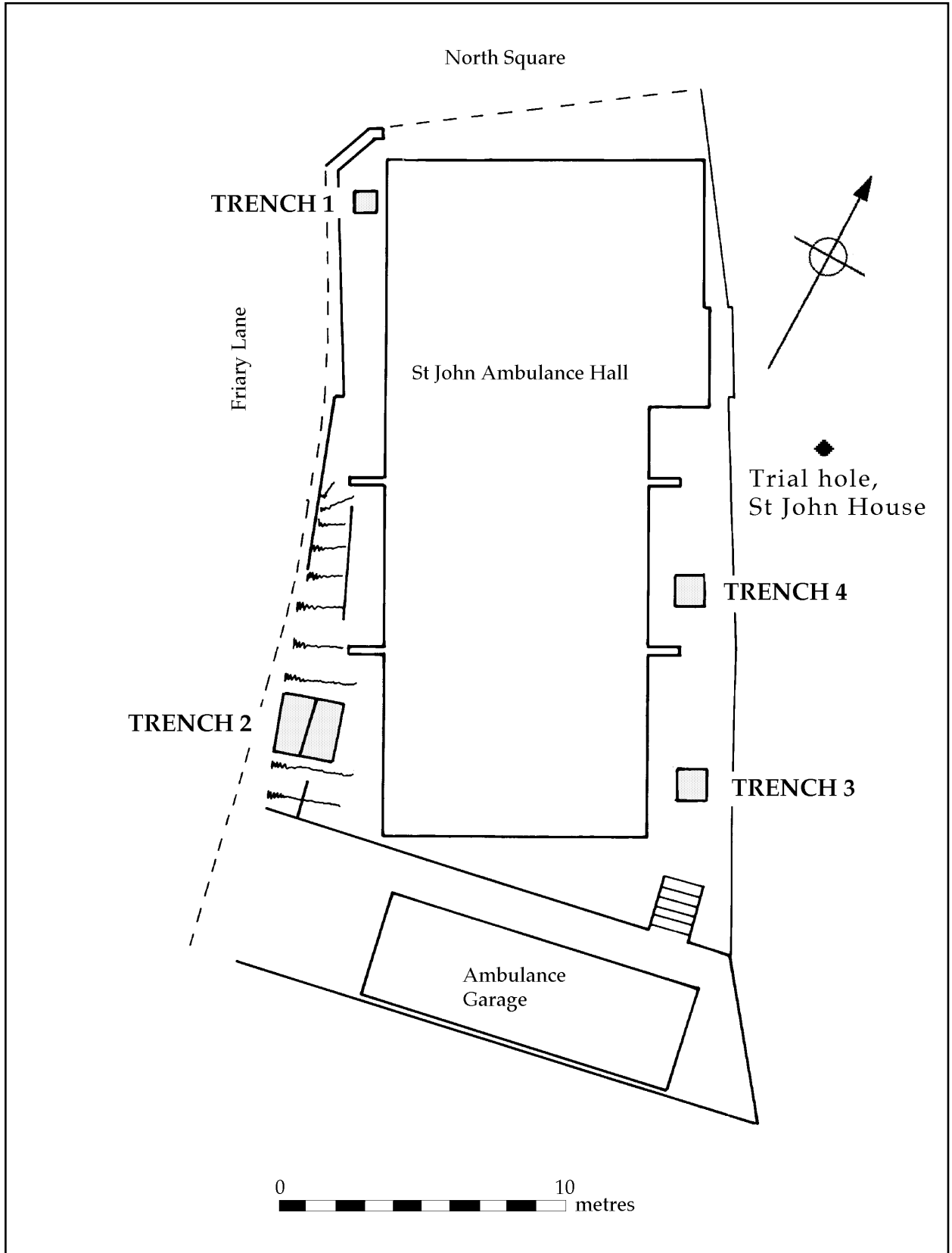


Figure 1: Location map