

The London Charterhouse and the Glasshouse Yard General Baptist burial ground: excavations at Therese House, EC1A

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with a contribution from Michael Henderson (osteology)

Introduction

Glasshouse Yard lies to the east of the medical college of St Bartholomew's Hospital and west of Goswell Road (Fig 1). The site lies within the known eastern extent of the medieval London Charterhouse.

Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) undertook three phases of work on threatened areas of the site between 2001 and 2006.¹ A watching brief in 2001 located an inhumation initially interpreted as of medieval or later date. An evaluation in 2005 subsequently located part of a monastic cell, on the east side of the former 'great cloister', and evidence for a 17th- to 18th-century Nonconformist burial ground. Excavations in 2006 recorded pre-

monastic quarry pits, remains of two monastic cells and more of the Nonconformist burial ground, which was associated with a late 17th- to 18th-century Glasshouse Yard General Baptist chapel.

Roman quarry pits (AD 50–400)

The site lies north of the Roman city, to the west of a Roman road leading out of the city along Aldersgate and Goswell Road, and to the south of Old Street/Clerkenwell Road, which is hypothesised as the line of another Roman road.²

Excavations recorded eight quarry pits (Fig 2) dug into a weathered brickearth horizon. Four of these pits ([2], [117], [182], and [207]) contained

exclusively Roman dating evidence. A further three pits stratigraphically predated these and another pit appeared to be part of the same phase of activity.

Dating evidence comprised just 14 sherds of Roman pottery (three residual in later contexts) and a single piece of building material. Five Roman fabric types were identified, including nine sherds of fine greyware from only two pots. The forms present comprise a beaker (miscellaneous sand-tempered ware), a jar/beaker (fine greyware), a storage jar (grog-tempered ware), a mortarium (Colchester white ware) and a bowl (central Gaulish samian ware). Given the small amount of dating evidence in these quarry pits, there remains a possibility that they may represent part of the medieval phase of activity predating the construction of the monastery.

Medieval pits and fields (c. 1050–1370)

The area is little documented prior to the 12th century. It was initially owned by the priory and hospital of St Bartholomew Smithfield (founded 1123) and the priory of St John's Clerkenwell (founded 1144).³ The site was extensively quarried during this earlier part of the medieval period (Fig 2). Pit [107] contained a sherd of early Surrey ware pottery dating 1050–1150, but most dating evidence was from the period between 1140 and 1220. Twenty-six sherds from three pits [170], [142] and [107] were all of early medieval fabrics (coarse London-type ware, coarse London-type ware with calcareous inclusions, shelly-sandy ware and south Hertfordshire-type greyware). A total of 12 pits were attributed to this period.



Fig 1: site location

Overlying soil horizons contained a small group of pottery sherds, all from highly decorated, good quality jugs in Mill Green ware, Kingston-type ware, London-type ware with Rouen-style decoration and north French monochrome ware. This pottery dates to between 1240 and 1270, suggesting quarrying had given way to agricultural activity by the mid- to late 13th century.

The impact of the Black Death (1348–9) led to lands owned by the priory of St John and St Bartholomew's Hospital being acquired by the Bishop of London and by Sir Walter de Manny and given to the City as a burial ground. Black Death burials have been found beneath Charterhouse Square⁴ but the extent of the burial ground remains a matter of conjecture. No medieval burials were found during the excavation described here.

The Medieval London Charterhouse (c. 1370–1538)

The London Charterhouse, a Carthusian monastery, was founded by Manny in 1370, at least in part as a memorial to the victims of the epidemic.⁵ By 1377, the precinct stretched as far east as Goswell Road. The Charterhouse received its foundation charter in 1371 and by the end of that year some monastic cells were ready.⁶

Carthusian monks, unlike those of other orders, lived as hermits in individual 'cells'. Each cell consisted of a house for eating, sleeping and praying, a serving hatch for meal delivery and individual gardens and latrines. Following traditional Carthusian practice, cells were arranged around the edges of a 'great cloister' (Fig 1). The cells were referred to by letters of the alphabet. By 1398, 19 cells of the London Charterhouse had been built, but five were incomplete.

The history of the Charterhouse is well documented in publications such as St John Hope's narrative,⁷ which includes transcripts of the late 15th- to 16th-century 'Charterhouse Register', and in the combined work of David Knowles and W F Grimes following wartime damage to the standing buildings.⁸ A number of structural elements of the eastern side of the great cloister have been previously recorded. Excavations at Goswell

Road (site code GWO05; see Fig 1)⁹ have revealed remains of the north wall, latrine and drain of cell P and a stone-built latrine forming part of cell O (Fig 3).

The Charterhouse has also been extensively discussed in a MoLAS monograph,¹⁰ which included a conjectured plan of the Charterhouse cells,¹¹ part of which is shown in Fig 3. Part of cells R and S were found on the present site (Fig 3). These cells were donated by Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, possibly before 1381, but probably were not built until some time in the 15th century.¹²

Cell R

In 1959 the Finsbury District Surveyor recorded part of the doorway to cell R,¹³ locating the centre of this doorway at 14.66m north of the centre of the doorway to cell S, in an area close to the western site boundary. Excavation in 2006 located remains of an east–west aligned wall foundation [239] of over 1m width and 7m length forming part of the south wall of cell R (Fig 3). This foundation was constructed of a pale yellow-brown mortar with fragments of tile, Reigate stone and some gravel. North of this wall, part

of a north–south orientated footing [31] was recorded which was constructed using fragments of chalk and ragstone, within a pale sandy mortar. This wall appeared to form part of the east wall of the cell's accommodation.

Cell S

The eastern side of the blocked doorway to cell S was recorded by the Finsbury District Surveyor in 1959.¹⁴ Part of this doorway is preserved within the retaining wall on the western side of the site. The 2006 investigations recorded part of a chalk and mortar wall foundation [255] whose location was consistent with the alignment of the eastern boundary wall of cell S (Fig 3). Foundations of the cell building were located in the south-west corner of the site, where an east–west orientated cut was filled with chalk fragments bonded

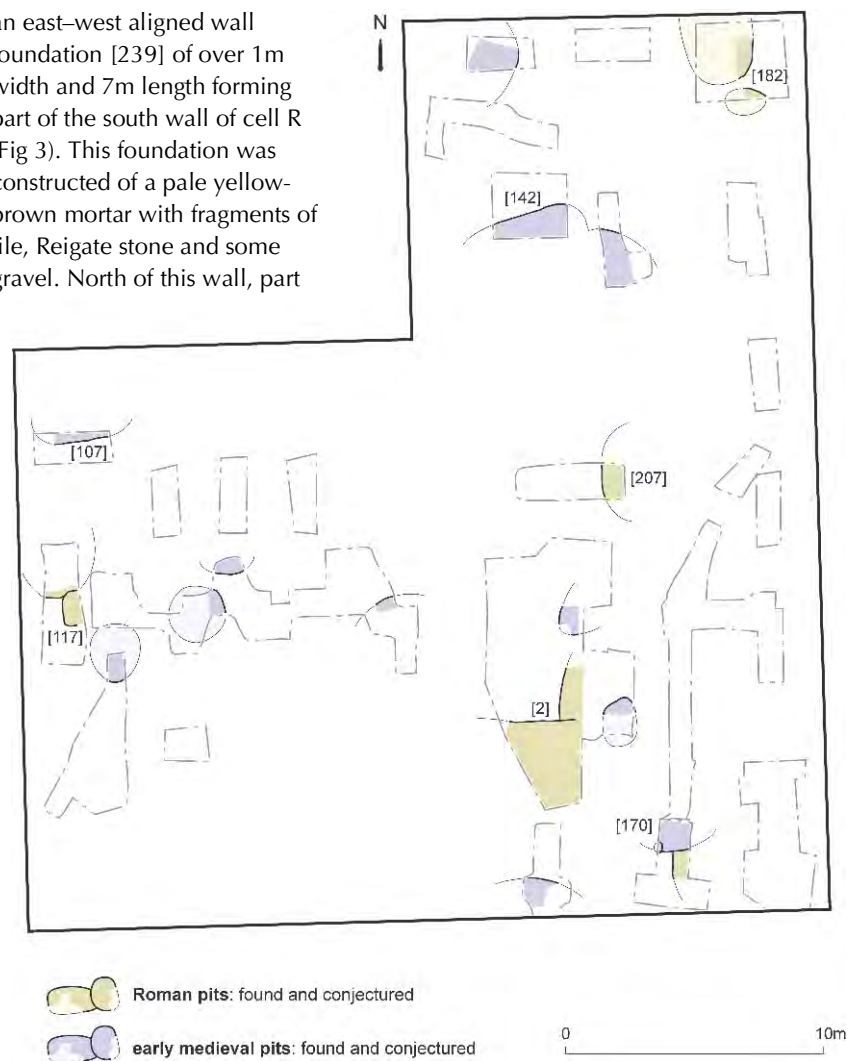


Fig 2: pre-monastic quarry pits

in pale grey mortar [147]. Two thin spreads of chalky mortar [124 and 125] survived within the northern extent of the cell and may be construction spreads or remnants of bedding for a robbed tile floor.

The end of the Charterhouse and the later establishment of a General Baptist ministry (c. 1538–1800)

After acquisition by Henry VIII in 1537, the Charterhouse changed hands again in 1545 when it was acquired by Sir Edward North, who built a manor house, destroying many of the monastery structures including parts of the cloister. After passing out of North's ownership and then being reacquired by him, the Charterhouse was sold in 1565 to the fourth Duke of Norfolk who renamed it Howard House before his execution in 1572. In 1611, Thomas Sutton bought the house as a school for 44 poor boys and a home for 80 poor gentlemen.¹⁵

In the same year, 1611, the first Baptist congregation in London was brought from Amsterdam by Thomas Helwys and John Morton, thus establishing the General Baptists. Although they prospered briefly during the Commonwealth (1649–1660), the General Baptists were persecuted throughout most of the 17th century before achieving toleration under William III (1689–1702). The General Baptist chapel at Glasshouse Yard was established by 1669.¹⁶ There was certainly a Nonconformist burial ground on the site in 1684, as during this year one Francis Bamfield, after his incarceration for his beliefs in Newgate Prison, is recorded as being interred at Glasshouse Yard.¹⁷

The Glasshouse Yard chapel, under the pastoral care of Thomas Kirby, was used for meetings in 1698 forming part of a group of General Baptist chapels which existed in London during the 17th century. This included chapels at

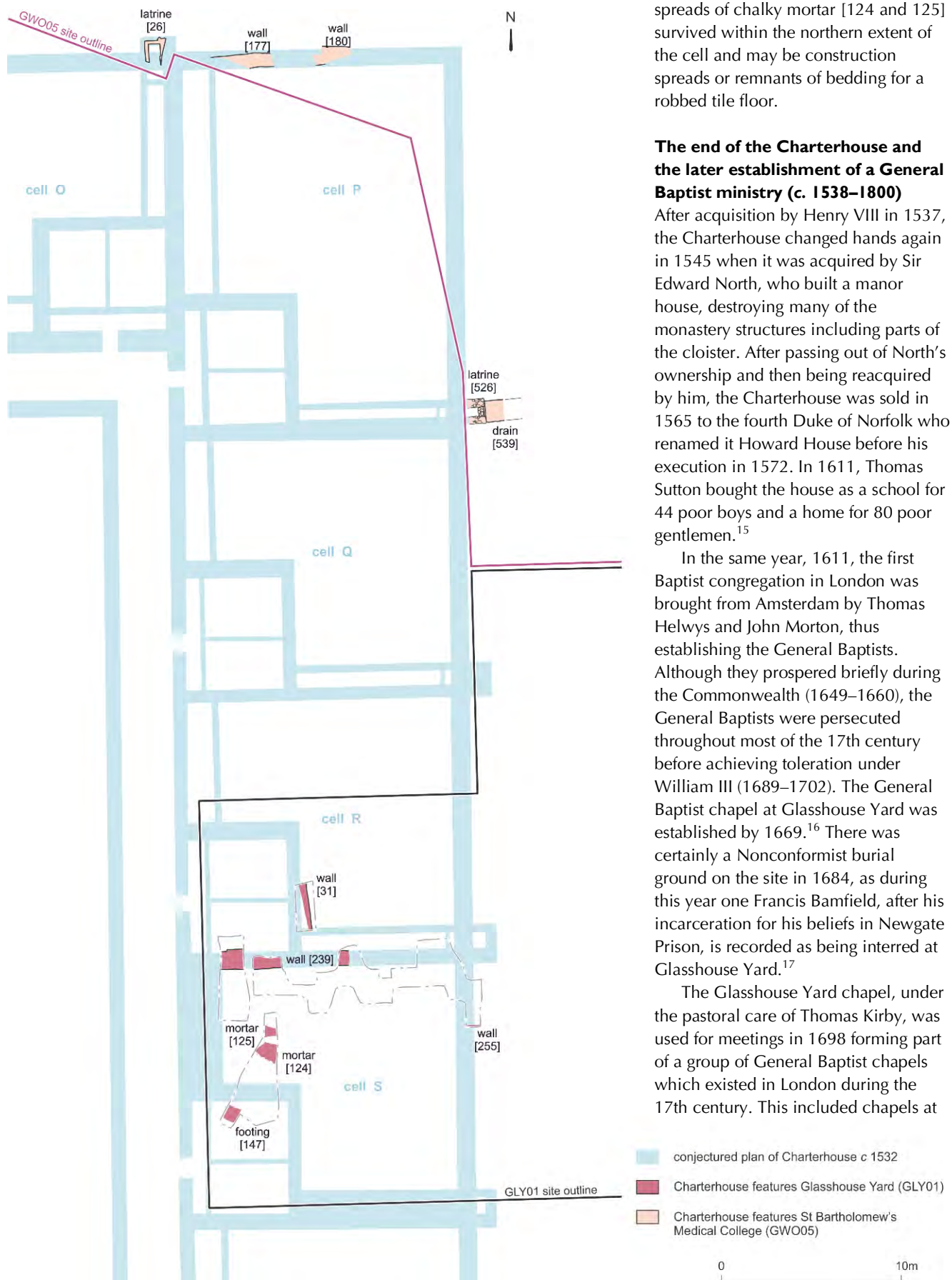


Fig 3: plan of recently excavated medieval structural features from GLY01 and GWO01 in relation to the conjectured plan of the London Charterhouse c. 1532

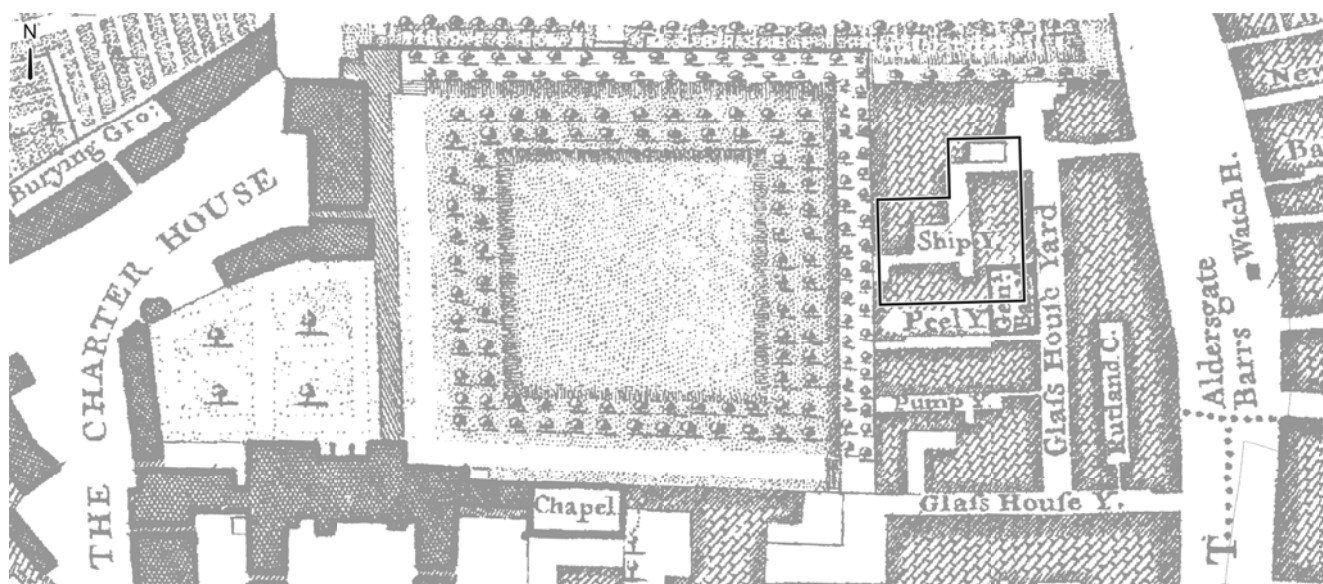


Fig 4: site outline superimposed on Roque's map of 1746

The Park (Southwark), Fair Street (Horsleydown), Whites Alley (Moorfields) and St Paul's Alley (Barbican). Rocque's map of 1746 labels the Glasshouse Yard chapel as 'Gen Bap M', at the south-eastern corner of the site, although the burial ground is not shown (Fig 4).

The chapel was presided over by Pastor Benjamin Treacher during part of the 1750s and 1760s, prior to his death in 1766.¹⁸ The congregation at Glasshouse Yard appears to have relocated to Fair Street in 1764 and St Paul's Alley in 1768, before finally moving to Worship Street in 1780, yet a Baptist discourse was preached at the Glasshouse Yard chapel in 1788,¹⁹ so it must have retained some use for the community. The building still appears as present on Horwood's map of 1799. The chapel was used by other Nonconformists in the early 19th century until it was sold at auction in 1825 and demolished.²⁰ No post-medieval structural remains were found in the excavation.

The burial ground

The archaeological excavation of burials was limited to designated trench positions, but results suggest the burial ground lay to the north and west of the chapel (Fig 4; Fig 5). Nineteen grave cuts were identified (Fig 5) of which 16 were orientated north–south (two of which were unexcavated) and three were orientated east–west. Two of the latter burials were supine with the

heads at the western end of the grave, as is consistent with orthodox Christian burials, however grave [164] contained a prone skeleton. Two of these three graves, [164] and [7], were located within the former extent of monastic cell S. Of the excavated north–south orientated graves, ten contained skeletons with the head positioned at the northern end of the grave and four with the head to the south. Most of the graves were discrete, but some intercutting graves ([12], [211], [215] and [227]) were located at the eastern side of the site.

All excavated graves contained a single articulated skeleton but, counting disarticulated material as well, the remains of 25 individuals were retrieved: 23 adults of which seven were male, four female and 12 of indeterminate sex. A perinatal individual aged approximately 40 weeks at birth (grave [34]) and an adolescent aged 13 years at death were also identified. The presence of re-deposited immature bone in graves of adults suggests a higher proportion of subadult burials were originally present within the burial ground.

Twenty-eight items of coffin furniture were retained from 14 graves. Coffin remains, including several coffin nails and three coffin handles of the right-angled type, were recovered from two graves. This type of handle tends to date to between c. 1650 and 1750. Evidence of green staining and the presence of copper-alloy pins suggested

that some of the bodies may have been wrapped in shrouds prior to burial. Cartographic evidence suggests, at the earliest, a late 17th-century date for the burial ground as there is no indication of it or the chapel on Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1676.

Pottery from the burial ground was mostly dated within the period c. 1580–1700, as indicated by the presence of Surrey–Hampshire border ware and London-area post-medieval red ware forms of late 16th- to mid-17th-century date. Grave [24] contained an assemblage of London-area post-medieval red ware and London-area post-medieval slipped red ware with clear yellow glaze, dating to between c. 1550 and 1600. A 16th-century jetton and three sherds of a glass drinking vessel were also recovered from the same grave.

Finds from the burial ground would appear to be mostly unreliable in providing a date for its use, but do support evidence for the destruction of monastic cells and redevelopment of the area from the mid-16th century onwards.

Osteology

The majority of the adults recorded were 36–45 years of age at death, which is consistent with frequencies recorded in the London Bills of Mortality for the post-medieval period.²¹ Dental pathology included evidence of calculus (mineralized plaque). There was also evidence of

tooth loss, caries (cavities), enamel hypoplasia and gum disease. One adult, aged 36–45 years, displayed calculus on the biting surfaces of molars of the right mandible, suggesting chewing was not occurring on this side. There was also corresponding disproportionately heavy dental wear on the left jaw. A male aged 36–45 years displayed a groove on the lower right front teeth indicative of habitual clay pipe smoking.

Two individuals showed evidence of infection. A perinatal skeleton (grave [34]) displayed bone formation resulting from inflammation (periostitis) to the surfaces of the long bones (limbs), scapula (shoulder), clavicle (collar bone) and sphenoid (skull). While no definite diagnosis could be confirmed, the distribution of these lesions may suggest a specific infection such as congenital syphilis²² or a metabolic disease such as rickets or scurvy.²³ One adult female displayed healed bone among the internal structures of the face (maxillary sinuses), diagnostic of longstanding sinusitis inflammation.

A male aged 18–25 displayed multiple congenital defects including abnormalities to the lower spine, with incomplete fusion of the vertebrae of the lower sacrum (spina bifida occulta). Deformities of his right and left hip joints were identified, with a reduced angle between the femoral neck and shaft (coxa vara). This person may have suffered restricted movement and may have walked with a painless abnormal gait.²⁴ There was severe shortening and abnormal joint formation to a right finger, possibly the result of a congenital defect, or trauma-induced changes to normal bone growth, in early childhood.²⁵ The skeleton also displayed linear defects (enamel hypoplasia) to some of the front teeth, as well as rampant carious decay of the central incisors and right canine. Lesions (cribra orbitalia) of pitted bone were recorded in the roofs of his eye sockets. Malnutrition, stress or illness during childhood may have affected the normal development of this individual.²⁶

Childhood injury was evident in a male (18–25 years old) who displayed a healed fracture to the left humerus (upper arm). The distal joint surface displayed an abnormal angulation

towards the body (cubitus varus), a common deformity of the elbow that would not have restricted function of the joint.²⁷

A robust male aged 36–45 years displayed rotator cuff disease in the shoulder joints. A lesion was present on the under surface of the right clavicle at the insertion point for the costo-clavicular ligament. Such defects have previously been associated with activity-related trauma in young adults.²⁸ The skeleton had a fractured left foot bone (navicular), with non-union of the fragmented bone and new bone growth at the joint margins. This may have resulted in stiffness, localized pain and secondary osteoarthritis.²⁹ A rib fracture displayed secondary osteoarthritis at the joint articulating with the spine. Such injuries may be caused by repetitive activity or alternatively a blow or fall.³⁰ The combination of these bone changes, together with evidence of degenerative joint disease observed in the cervicle (upper spine) may point to a life involving some form of manual labour.

Conclusion

The site at Glasshouse Yard revealed possible evidence for Roman quarry pits or medieval activity predating the construction of the priory and hospital of St Bartholomew Smithfield and the priory of St John's Clerkenwell in the 12th century. Later the land was given to the City as a burial ground when the London Charterhouse was founded in 1370, in part, as a memorial of the victims of the Black Death and evidence for two 15th-century stone monastic cells was uncovered. The General Baptist chapel had been established at Glasshouse Yard by 1669 and the excavation revealed burials from the Nonconformist burial ground opened in 1684. The pathology of the

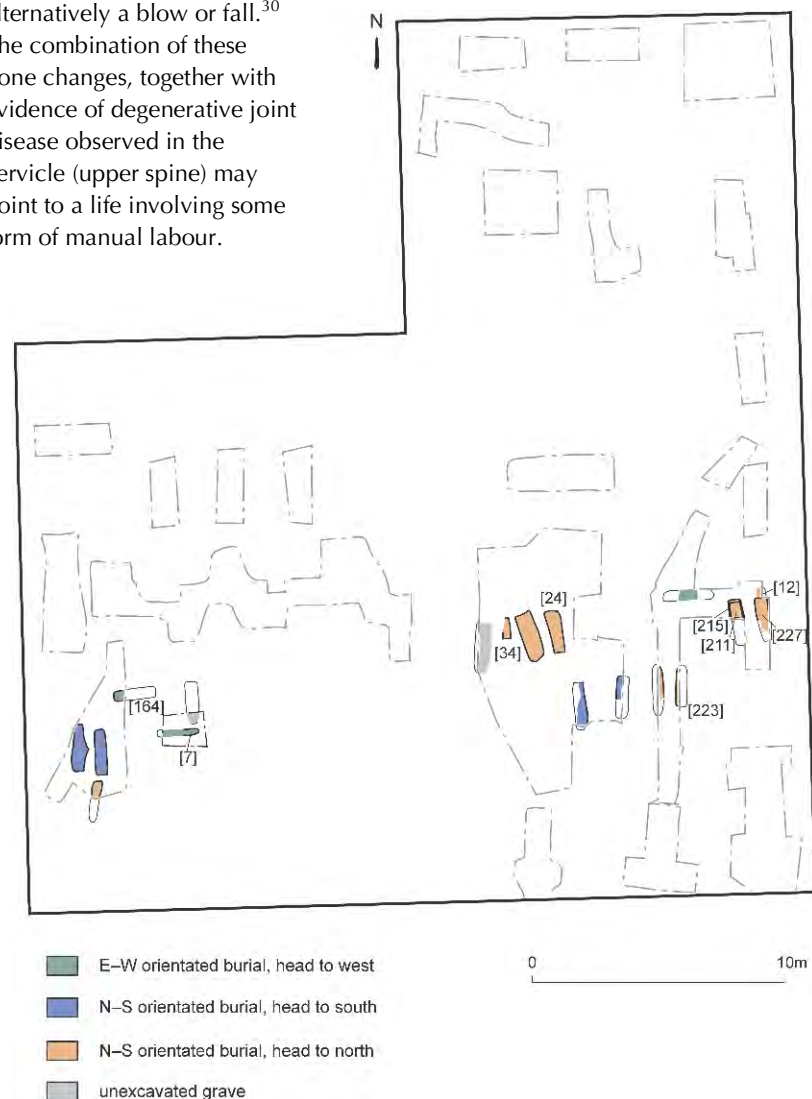


Fig 5: plan showing location and orientation of graves in the Baptist burial ground

skeletons revealed that their ages were consistent with those recorded in the post-medieval London Bills of Mortality.

Acknowledgements

MOLA would like to thank Paul Chadwick and Sally Dicks of CgMs Consulting for commissioning the work on behalf of their client, Therese House Investment Limited. MOLA would also

like to thank Dianne Abrams, the archaeological curator of GLAAS.

The authors would like to thank Derek Seeley of MOLA and Lucy Whittingham of AOC, formerly of MOLA, for project management and also Mark Burch of MOLA Geomatics. Additional specialist reports by Terence Smith (building materials), Adrian Miles (coffin materials), Lyn Blackmore (glass

and pottery) and Nicola Powell (accessioned finds) supported the conclusions of this article and are available in the project archive. The illustrations were prepared by Juan Jose Fuldain and Judit Peresztegi.

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Stephen Humphrey, 1952–2016

an appreciation by Richard Buchanan

Stephen Humphrey was born near the Elephant and Castle, and worked for thirty years at the Southwark Local History Library, ultimately becoming the Borough Archivist. At school he founded the school's archaeological society, then read history at Cambridge and studied archives at University College London. His career was curtailed in 2010 when Southwark Council had a reorganisation, leading to his early retirement – something many people welcome, but not Stephen who enjoyed his work. He never got over this setback, despite being made a Freeman of Southwark in March 2012.

He was an ex-President of the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society and President of the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey Local History Society. He was additionally Hon Treasurer of the Surrey Records Society – a closely related body, Southwark being in Surrey until London encroached – and was

Hon Secretary of the Ecclesiological Society from 1979 to 1991. He then edited its *Bulletin*, giving him a broader knowledge on church architecture – put to good use when arranging coach trips for his several societies. One Cambridge trip included a visit to All Saints' Church, a highly decorated Victorian rebuild now redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust, and Stephen handed out a self-penned booklet he had produced for the Ecclesiologists.

As is so often the case with busy people, retirement did not lessen the amount of work that he took on, nor stopped him being the first port of call for questions on Southwark – to which he ungrudgingly gave full and informative replies. His last publication, in late 2013, was *The Elephant and Castle – a History*, and he was working on another on Tooley Street. At the time of his death, his failure to attend a



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meeting of the Rotherhithe and Bermondsey Local History Society to give his Presidential address raised the alert and the tributes subsequently flowed in.

Stephen led a bachelor life with modest requirements, and was always well turned out – in a style reminiscent of the 1960s. He was always a gentleman, approachable and helpful to whomsoever he met. He was renowned for his unparalleled knowledge of the history of the entire borough of Southwark and beyond. All historians and archaeologists who have worked in the borough will mourn his passing.