

Jesus College, Chapel Court.

Archaeological Watching Brief

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An archaeological watching brief has been conducted by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) at Jesus College, Cambridge, between the 1st and the 26th of September, 2011 and then, again later, in March of the following year. This primarily consisted of the monitoring of drainage works associated with the refurbishment of the Carpenter and Morley Horder Buildings, which are situated a short distance to the east of the former Benedictine Nunnery of St Mary and St Rhadegund.

In the September-phase, a near-continuous circuit of drainage pipes was established around these structures, although the southern portion of this loop – surrounding the Morley Horder Building – made use of a pre-existing culvert and did not, therefore, require the excavation of any undisturbed deposits (Fig. 1). The remaining portion of the circuit was excavated by a 360 degree mechanical excavator to a depth of between 0.6m and 0.9m within a trench 0.6m wide. Monitoring of this work revealed a relatively simple sequence: a layer of sub-soil overlain by a remnant top-soil horizon. This latter was overlain, in turn, by a layer of made/disturbed ground associated with the construction of the adjacent buildings in the late 19th century. The sequence was capped by a band of rubble hardcore and, finally, a modern top-soil deposit. Along the length of the trench, no archaeological features or material culture was identified. A representative section of the sequence has been drawn within one of the two manholes, as these extended to a depth of 1.85m.

The March monitoring first occurred along a c. 1.00m wide and 0.90m deep trench running along the south side of the Morely Horder Building and which then turned south to continue along the west side of the driveway down to Jesus Lane. Apart the localised survival of a c. 0.30m deep sandy silt sub-soil within its lower section, essentially the sequence consisted of top-soil deposits. Undisturbed geological/natural gravels were only observed at two points as approximately metre-square ‘patches’; otherwise, no obvious ‘archaeology’ was present and the trenches’ base lay upon backfilled gravel quarries (i.e. directly comparable to those at the earlier, Library Site excavations; Evans *et al.* 1998).

Subsequent groundworks immediately behind/east of the Chapel comprised the re-laying of a c. 2m wide by 0.2m deep pathway. Along the eastern edge of this a deeper ‘soakaway’ trench, c. 0.5m wide by up to 0.6m deep, was also dug. The CAU were called to the site when the removal of the existing path revealed a deposit of disarticulated human bone.

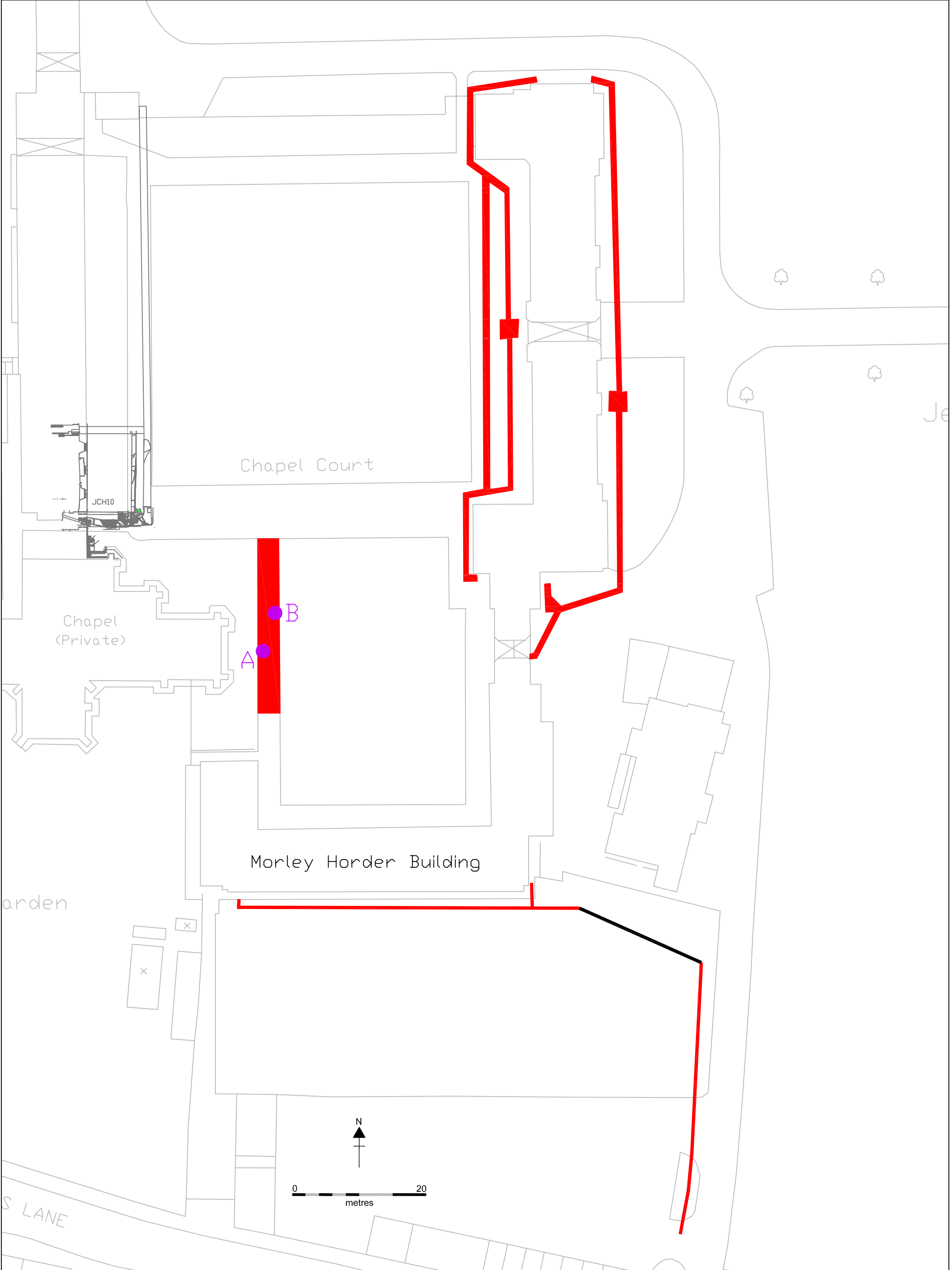
Beneath the existing pathway was a layer of hardcore (largely comprising brick fragments) up to 0.15m thick, which overlay a layer of made-ground comprising dumps of garden soil and gravel, a minimum of 0.3m deep. In some areas a potentially ‘undisturbed’ sandy subsoil was exposed in the base of the ‘soakaway’ trench at a depth of around 0.4m, however, the made-ground was seen to extend beyond the base of the trench along most of its length.

A number of features, all modern, were exposed within the ‘soakaway’ trench including two brick drains, an earlier brick-filled ‘soakaway’, a brick and concrete wall/culvert foundation and two further ‘cuts’ of unknown function. Of greater significance were two discrete concentrations of disarticulated human bone encountered within the layers of made-ground. The first concentration (A), the larger

of the two, was located immediately beneath the hardcore layer, just 0.15m below the current ground surface. The 0.18m thick deposit of human bone extended over *c.* 0.36 x 0.26m and the assemblage appeared to be dominated by long bones and fragments of pelvis and skull (Fig. 2). The deposit clearly comprised the remains of numerous individuals with at least three skulls present. The second concentration of human bone (**B**) was less 'dense' and situated slightly deeper, *c.* 0.35m below the current ground surface. Once again, long bones, skull fragments and pelvis fragments were identified within the deposit as well as fragments of ribs and spine. Following brief examination the human bone was reburied on site. No evidence of *in situ* or articulated human bone was encountered and it is reasonable to assume that any surviving burials occur at a greater depth than 0.6m and were consequently undisturbed by the current groundworks.

Given the proximity to the Chapel the recovery of human bone is to be expected and the deposits strongly suggest the presence of a cemetery at this location; in all probability, that of St Rhadegund's nuns. However, the human bone was clearly out of context and must surely derive from burials disturbed by previous groundworks – probably during installation of services – at the site. Given the presence of bones from numerous individuals such previous groundworks have clearly disturbed a number of graves.

Evans, C., A. Dickens and D.A.H. Richmond 1998. Cloistered Communities: Archaeological and Architectural Investigations in Jesus College, Cambridge, 1988-97. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 86: 91-144.



PROJECT NAME: Jesus College
 SITE CODE: N/A

DRAWING TITLE: New trenches
 March 2012

DRAWN BY: JM
 DATE: 29/03/12

SITE CENTRE CO-ORDINATES: 545300/258890
 SCALE: See bar

LEGEND:
 - Monitored
 - Unmonitored
 ● Human bone deposit
 - Earlier work



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Disarticulated human bone Deposit A in situ



Bone recovered from disarticulated human bone Deposit B