

Mount Anvil

Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich

NGR TQ 3850 7760

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION REPORT

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1999

Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich

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Archaeological Field Evaluation Report

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich in October 1999, on behalf of Mount Anvil. The evaluation was commissioned in advance of the proposed construction of a conference facility, student accommodation building and an electricity sub-station. These are to be situated within Greenwich Royal Hospital Burial Ground, in use between 1742 and 1847. Five trenches (Nos. 10-14) were excavated within the area of the footprint of the proposed buildings; five graves were revealed in Trench 10, four in Trench 11 and two in Trench 12. Trench 13 revealed a series of intercutting post-medieval ditches and pits with one possible medieval ditch; Trench 14 revealed a post-medieval wall foundation and a series of intercutting pits. In Trenches 10 to 13 the pits, ditches and articulated human remains were uncovered c. 1.2m below the present ground level; in Trench 14 the features were found at c. 0.80m below the present ground level.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an archaeological field evaluation at the Devonport Buildings (Fig. 1), King William Walk, Greenwich from the 18th to the 27th of October, 1999. The evaluation was carried out prior to the proposed construction of a conference facility (within an existing tennis court) and a student accommodation block, the latter involving the demolition of an existing southern wing of the Devonport Buildings built in 1852. A small electricity sub-station is also to be constructed.

The evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Mount Anvil, and was monitored on site by Ken Whittaker of English Heritage (Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service). The work was defined by a written scheme of investigation (OAU August 1999) approved by English Heritage as an appropriate response to their brief (English Heritage July 1999).

1.2 Geology and Topography

The area of proposed development is located in the south-western corner of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich (Fig. 2), beside the Devonport Buildings (NGR TQ 3850 7760). The River Thames lies c 350 m to the north of the site, and Greenwich Park lies 100 m to the south-east. The Royal Naval College lies across from the Hospital, on the north side of the Romsey Road. The geology is Quaternary Floodplain Gravel (BGS 1981) overlying Head deposits.

Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich.

2 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Historical background

This brief historical summary is based on the desk top study *Devonport Buildings, King William Walk, Greenwich* (OAU October 1999).

The area under investigation is situated within the former area of the Greenwich Royal Hospital Burial Ground, which was in use between 1742 and 1847. The Royal Hospital at Greenwich was founded in 1694 by Royal Charter on land adjacent to the existing Royal Palace, and east of the borough of Greenwich itself. Intended originally as a naval counterpart to the Chelsea Hospital for soldiers, the burial ground was closed in 1856, with the hospital surviving until 1869 when its buildings were taken over by the Royal Naval College. Construction of a tunnel for the London-Greenwich railway in the 1870s, which ran through the northern part of the burial ground, necessitated the exhumation of an estimated 1,400 bodies. In 1892 a memorial was erected by the Admiralty to the memory of the 20,000 naval pensioners buried there. A further 4,000 bodies were exhumed in 1925, to allow the construction of the Dreadnought Buildings across the northern part of the burial ground. The southern part of the burial ground is currently under tennis courts.

2.2 Archaeological background

In July 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief (OAU July 1999) during the excavation of seven engineering test pits in the vicinity of the infirmary and of Devonport Buildings. This revealed evidence of human burials, particularly in the area of the existing tennis courts and the memorial. The burials were within, or sealed by, a substantial layer of accumulated grave soil, containing post-medieval debris. No previous archaeological investigation is known to have been carried out in the vicinity of the site.

3 INVESTIGATION AIMS

The aims of the field excavation were as follows:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the development area and to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains.
- To establish the artefactual potential of any archaeological features and deposits.
- To define the research potential, prioritise importance, and to determine corresponding minimum levels of data collection for demographic structure of the

cemetery population; burial rite and undertaking practices; skeletal palaeopathology; topographic structure and development of the cemetery.

- 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.
- To make available the results of the investigation, in the form of a written report.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Trench locations

The written scheme of investigation as agreed with English Heritage required four trenches measuring 2.5 m by 2 m within the footprint of the proposed conference centre. The details of the proposed student accommodation building were not available when the WSI was drawn up, but were presented by Mount Anvil during a site meeting with English Heritage and OAU. (19/9/1999). Ken Whittaker of EH requested a single evaluation trench measuring 2.5 m by 2 m (Trench 14). For trench locations see Fig. 2.

4.2 Excavation and recording procedures

Mechanical excavation of overburden or non-archaeologically significant deposits proceeded to the top of archaeological deposits, burials or natural (whichever was the highest). All further investigation was by hand.

Site procedures for the evaluation were undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the OAU *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson 1992), and the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service's Guidance Papers 3, *Standards and Practices in Archaeological Fieldwork in London*.

Detailed recording of burial evidence was carried out as specified in the *OAU Field Manual* and Section 3.5 'Recording and excavation of skeletons and coffin: Introduction' in the *MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual*. The skeletons were exposed, cleaned, assessed, planned and photographed, but not lifted.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 10 (Fig. 3)

Trench 10 measured 4.5 m by 4 m at ground level (stepped out so as to create a safe working area) with an area 2.5 m by 3 m investigated at the base. This was excavated to a maximum depth of 6.95 m OD, 1.4 m below the top 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 east-west aligned grave cuts were seen in the natural: 1000, 1010, 1013, 1032 and 1045. All cuts except 1010, contained articulated, well preserved skeletons, and were filled with an orange brown silty sand (disturbed redeposited natural) with ceramic building material (CBM) inclusions. In the south end of the trench grave 1010 cut grave 1000 to the east, so that the left side and cranium of skeleton 1002 was missing. Grave 1010 was excavated no further than the layer of disarticulated charnel remains, presumably within the backfill of a further inhumation. Grave 1000 was also truncated on its eastern side by grave 1013, so that the left tibia, fibula and foot bones were missing. These three inhumations, although slightly overlapping at their ends, were on a fairly precise east-west alignment. To the north of the trench, two inhumations were seen, with grave cut 1045 truncating grave cut 1032 to the west; these were also on a precise east-west alignment.

Of the skeletons exposed, 1047, 1002 and 1015 were identified as adult males, and the other remains were adult, but of indeterminable sex. None of the skeletons displayed any obvious palaeopathology, and where present the teeth were in very good condition. The skeletons and coffin fittings were left *in situ*. They were covered with a cushioning layer of natural sand prior to backfilling of the trenches.

The grave cuts had all been truncated prior to the laying of a concrete slab 1031, and the surviving skeletons were missed by 0.10 m below this. The slab may have formed a courtyard for the Maritime buildings, which are constructed from a similar level. Overlying this concrete were various rubble dumps sealed by make-up layers (1067 and 1068) and the tarmac tennis court (1072).

5.2 Trenches 11 and 12 (Fig. 4)

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

5.2.1 Trench 11

Four grave cuts were noted, each containing a fully articulated skeleton and coffin fittings, and backfilled with redeposited natural gravel. Grave 1113 was isolated in the north of the trench, containing a male adult (25-35 years of age). To the south the latest grave cut was 1116 which cut grave 1115; this burial was also the shallowest, with the skeleton 1105 at 7.11 m OD. The skull was damaged by the construction of the concrete surface (1122), so that sex could not be determined. Grave 1115 contained two burials (1104, 1103). Burial 1104 was an adult male with the overlying skeleton 1103 being an adult female. Grave 1114 immediately to the north of 1115 also contained two burials (1102, 1101). Skeleton 1102 was obscured by 1101 which was an adult female. None of the skeletons exhibited any obvious pathology.

5.2.2 Trench 12

Two graves were revealed, backfilled with redeposited natural. This was overlaid by a dark brown sandy silt with CBM inclusions. Grave cut 1207 was aligned north-south on the west side of the trench, and grave cut 1204 was aligned east-west on the east side of the trench. No skeleton remained in 1207 but two coffin nails were observed. Grave 1204 contained a fully articulated adult female skeleton (1200) and coffin fittings, including coffin handles of Spitalfields type 2a (Reeve and Adams 1993, Appendix D), dating from 1763-1837, and a corroded illegible coffin plate; no palaeopathology was seen. The skeleton had slumped at such an angle as to suggest that at least one further burial lay beneath it.

The concrete surface (1122)/(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.

5.3 Trench 13 (Fig. 5)

The trench measured 4.5 m by 4.5 m at ground surface stepping down to an investigated area of 2 m by 2.5 m, and excavated to a maximum depth of 6.70 m OD, 1.89 m 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 observed in this trench consisted of several ditches and pits containing post-medieval pottery, filled with homogenous brown sandy silt, overlying natural gravels which have 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.

5.4 Trench 14 (Fig. 6)

This trench base measured 2 m by 2.5 m, with a step added to enable access. The trench was excavated to a depth of 6.43 m OD, revealing the level of natural gravel (1421), 2.10 m below ground level. 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 a 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 a 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).

6 FINDS

6.1 Pottery

The small amount of pottery recovered was scanned by Cathy Underwood-Keevil. The earliest was a sherd of Coarse Borderware (c. AD 1350 - 1500) from context 1313 (fill of ditch 1312). A fragment of tripod pitkin in Post-Medieval Red Ware came from context 1316 (fill of pit 1315).

Contexts 1110 (gravel fills) contained a sherd of late 17th century tin-glazed dish, and a sherd of Staffordshire Comb Slip tankard. Another grave fill from the same trench produced Post-Medieval Red Ware, Red Basalt Ware and Post-Medieval Iron Rich Ware, giving a date of c. 1750 -1800

Lastly, context 1416 (pit fill) can be dated to the 17th to 18th centuries by the presence of Tin Glazed Ware (London-type) and Post-Medieval Red Wares.

6.2 Other finds

A very small quantity of clay pipe stems and animal bone constituted the remaining finds. Brick samples were taken from the walls in Trench 14.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Trenches 10-13 (area of proposed conference centre)

In the area of the proposed conference centre, archaeological deposits have been shown to lie at depths of between 1.17 m and 1.3 m below current ground level, i.e. from 7.18 m to 7.35 m OD. In the northern part of this area Trench 13 revealed pits and ditches, with one ditch possibly dating to the medieval period although the dating evidence was very sparse.

Human burials were observed only in Trenches 10, 11 and 12. They are likely to extend further north, south and west but were not present in either Trench 13 or 14. The skeletons were at 7.11 m OD or deeper, 1.4 m below current ground level. Eleven articulated skeletons were exposed, and at least two more may have been present; the graves formed two rows aligned east west. One possible north-south grave was found in Trench 12 but as this feature contained only coffin nails but no

bone, it may have been excavated for a different purpose. A north-south grave in the context of an 18th to 19th century graveyard would certainly be unusual.

It is clear that only the lower part of the graves survived; the upper part, and indeed entire graves dug to a shallower depth, had been removed by truncation of the area prior to laying a concrete yard surface, probably earlier this century. Neither the full original depth of the graves, nor the height of the original ground surface, can therefore be reconstructed. The defined depth for burial was 8 feet (OAU October 1999: 5) though this may not always have been adhered to. In parts of the cemetery skeletons survive stacked at least two deep, but there was no evidence of deeper stacking.

Where a single inhumation is contained in a grave, the remains are predominantly those of adult males, presumably sailors. Where two inhumations were found in a single grave, both sexes are present, and the females may therefore be the spouses or offspring of sailors. No juvenile remains were seen.

All coffins were of wood and appear to show the remains of coffin plates. Grave 1204 was the only grave with recognisable coffin handles, suggesting that the majority of burials in this area were of low-ranking men and their families, using simple coffins. In general the skeletal remains have moderate potential to reconstruct the population and palaeopathology of the hospital – the potential would be higher but for the heavy truncation of the cemetery, and the small sample which is likely to result from the project.

No earlier archaeology was found below the graves, but Trench 13, which had no burials, contained a possible medieval ditch – this could have been related to Greenwich Palace but is only likely to be a field or garden feature. The post-medieval ditches from the same trench are interesting in that they may have defined part of the cemetery.

7.2 Trench 14 (area of proposed student accommodation)

The crude brick wall in Trench 14, of which only a small fragment was found, is likely to be part of the buildings shown in this area on the map drawn by Rocque (1744) and on the Map of the Hundred of Blackheath (1778) (OAU October 1999: Figs 4 and 5). The buildings were not present on the mapping of 1695, and were probably demolished by 1783 for the construction of the hospital school infirmary (Ibid.: 6).

The area was much disturbed by later services, and south of the trench the existing building will have removed most of the archaeology. Within the footprint of the proposed new building, the potential to gain further information about these buildings is therefore very limited.

8 IMPACT

8.1 Area of proposed conference centre

The design of the new building has not yet been finalised. It is likely that it will utilise pad and strip foundations cut to the level of the natural gravel, and will therefore impact on any burials and on the other medieval/post-medieval features. The extent of any archaeological mitigation required will depend ultimately on the final design.

8.2 Area of proposed student accommodation

The potential here is very limited, and the impact on significant archaeology will be small. It would seem reasonable that an archaeological watching brief could be implemented to mitigate the impact.

8.3 Electricity substation

The proposed substation was not part of the archaeological evaluation as it lies below an existing bicycle shed, and is not accessible until after demolition. The proposed substation measures 3.36 m x 4.05 m with 1.8 m deep foundations. Burials may well be present in this area and it is likely that some controlled archaeological excavation will be required following demolition and removal of overburden. The foundations of the existing building are of unknown depth, but may have already damaged some of the archaeological deposits.

9 SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive including the finds will be deposited with the Museum of London.

Andrew Norton and David Wilkinson, Oxford Archaeological Unit, November 1999

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Appendix 1: Table 1 Trench 10 - Context Information

Context	Type	Depth	Length/Width	Comments
1000	Cut	-	1.9 by 0.92m	Grave cut
1001	Fill	-		Grave fill
1002	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1003-1008	Nails	-	-	Coffin nails
1009	Group	-	-	Grave group
1010	Cut	-	-	Grave cut
1011	Fill	-	-	Grave fill
1012	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1013	Cut	-	-	Grave cut
1014	Fill	-	-	Grave fill
1015	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1016	Group	-	-	Grave group
1017	Group	-	-	Grave group
1018	Layer	-	-	Natural sand and gravel
1019-1030	Coffin fittings	-	-	Nails and coffin plate
1031	Surface	0.15m	-	Concrete surface
1032	Cut	-	1.0m by 1.0m	Grave cut
1033	Fill	-	-	Grave fill
1034	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1035	Group	-	-	Grave group
1036-1044	Nails	-	-	Coffin nails
1045	Cut	-	1.35m by 0.80m	Grave cut
1046	Fill	-	-	Grave fill
1047	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1048-1064	Nails	-	-	Coffin nails
1065	Group	-	-	Grave group
1066	Coffin plate	-	-	Coffin plate
1067	Layer	0.70m	2.50m	Silty sand layer

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1068	Layer	0.90m	1.60m	Demolition layer
1069	Fill	0.60m	1.80m	Rubble fill of pit
1070	Structure	0.20m	0.70m	Concrete block
1071	Fill	0.40m	1.70m	Rubble fill of pit
1072	Surface	0.40m	-	Tarmac surface
1073	Cut	0.60m	1.80m	Rubble filled pit

Appendix 2: Table 2 Trench 11 - Context Information

Context	Type	Depth	Length/Width	Comments
1100	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1101	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1102	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1103	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1104	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1105	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1106	Coffin	-	-	Coffin remains
1107	Coffin	-	-	Coffin remains
1108	Coffin	-	-	Coffin remains
1109	Fill	0.20m	-	Grave fill
1110	Fill	0.50m	-	Grave fill
1111	Fill	0.50m	-	Grave fill
1112	Fill	>0.15m	-	Grave fill
1113	Cut	0.20m	0.95m by 0.75m	Grave cut
1114	Cut	0.50m	1.9m by 0.50m	Grave cut
1115	Cut	0.50m	- by 0.65m	Grave cut
1116	Cut	-	-	Grave cut
1117	Group	-	-	Grave group
1118	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel and sand
1119	Group	-	-	Grave group

1120	Group	-	-	Grave group
1121	Group	-	-	Grave group
1122	Surface	0.15m	-	Concrete surface
1123	Coffin	-	-	Coffin fittings

Appendix 3: Table 3 Trench 12 - Context Information

Context	Type	Depth	Length/Width	Comments
1200	Skeleton	-	-	Skeleton
1201	Coffin stain	0.30	1.20m by 0.65m	Coffin stain
1202	Fill	0.55m	-	Grave fill
1203	Fill	0.25m	-	Grave fill
1204	Cut	0.55m	1.40m by 0.90m	Grave cut
1205	Group	-	-	Grave group
1206	Group	-	-	Grave group
1207	Cut	0.05m	0.80m by 0.50m	Grave cut
1208	Fill	0.05m	-	Grave fill
1209	Layer	0.30m	-	Tarmac and make-up
1210	Layer	0.40m	-	Make-up layer
1211	Fill	0.80m	-	Pit fill
1212	Cut	0,80m	1.50m	Pit
1213	Layer	0.90m	-	Dump of material
1214	layer	0.90m	-	Dump of material
1215	Surface	0.05m	-	Concrete surface
1216	Layer	0.10m	-	Subsoil
1217	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel and sand

Appendix 4: Table 4 Trench 13 - Context Information

Context	Type	Depth	Length/Width	Comments
1300	Surface	0.10m	-	Tarmac surface
1301	Layer	0.20m	-	Demolition dump
1302	Layer	0.15m	-	Make-up layer
1303	Layer	0.01m	-	Clay layer
1304	Layer	0.14m	-	Make-up layer
1305	Layer	0.12m	-	Sandy silt layer
1306	Layer	0.01m	-	Sandy silt layer
1307	Layer	0.02m	-	Silty sand layer
1308	Layer	0.02m	-	Demolition layer
1309	Layer	0.10m	-	Silty sand lens
1310	Layer	0.40m	-	Demolition layer
1311	Layer	0.40m	-	Chalk lens
1312	Cut	0.36m	1.25m	Ditch cut
1313	Fill	0.25m	-	Ditch fill
1314	Fill	0.10m	-	Ditch fill
1315	Cut	0.45m	0.20m	Pit cut
1316	Fill	0.45m	-	Pit fill
1317	Cut	0.30m	1.0m	Pit cut
1318	Fill	0.10m	-	Pit fill
1319	Fill	0.20m	-	Pit fill
1320	Cut	0.26m	0.45m	Ditch cut
1321	Fill	0.26m	-	Ditch fill
1322	Fill	0.25m	-	Ditch fill
1323	Fill	0.22m	-	Ditch fill
1324	Cut	0.44m	-	Ditch cut
1325	Fill	0.10m	-	Ditch fill
1326	Fill	0.30m	-	Ditch fill
1327	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel and sand
1328	Cut	0.45m	1.0m	Pit cut
1329	Fill	0.45m	-	Pit fill

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Appendix 5: Table 5 Trench 14 - Context Information

Context	Type	Depth	Length/Width	Comments
1400	Layer	0.40m	-	Tarmac and concrete
1401	Layer	0.40m	-	Garden soil
1402	Fill	0.35m	-	Pit fill
1403	Fill	0.10m	-	Pit fill
1404	Fill	0.40m	-	Pit fill
1405	Cut	0.60m	2.30m	Pit cut
1406	Fill	1.0m	-	Pit fill
1407	Cut	1.0m	1.0m	Pit cut
1408	Layer	0.20m	-	Garden soil
1409	Mortar	0.40m	-	Foundation mortar
1410	Structure	0.40m	-	Foundations
1411	Fill	0.40m	-	Foundation backfill
1412	Cut	0.80m	1.60m	Foundation cut
1413	Fill	0.04m	-	Pit fill
1414	Fill	0.30m	-	Pit fill
1415	Fill	0.40m	-	Pit fill
1416	Fill	0.30m	-	Pit fill
1417	Fill	0.20m	-	Pit fill
1418	Fill	0.15m	-	Pit fill
1419	Cut	1.0m	2.40m	Pit cut
1420	Fill	0.30m	-	Pit fill
1421	Layer	-	-	Natural gravel and sand