

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, ORCHESTON**

**WILTSHIRE**

**SU 05980 44695**

*On behalf of*

*The Churches Conservation Trust*

**August 2005**

<b>REPORT FOR</b>	The Churches Conservation Trust 1 West Smithfield London EC1A 9EE
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## Summary

*A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during drainage works for the church. The majority of the drainage levels were just above the uppermost level of burials and little disturbance was caused by these. Several inhumations were disturbed by the deepening of the existing soakaways.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The Church of St George is situated towards the south end of the village of Orcheston (NGR SU 05980 44695) in the parish of Orcheston St. Mary.

### 1.2 Planning Background

The Churches Conservation Trust carried out repairs to the drainage of the church. This included the installation of new surface and rainwater gullies, new underground drain runs and the deepening of two existing soakaways. Due to the potential for items of archaeological interest to be revealed an archaeological watching brief was maintained during the course groundworks.

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Assistant Archaeologist for Wiltshire County Council.

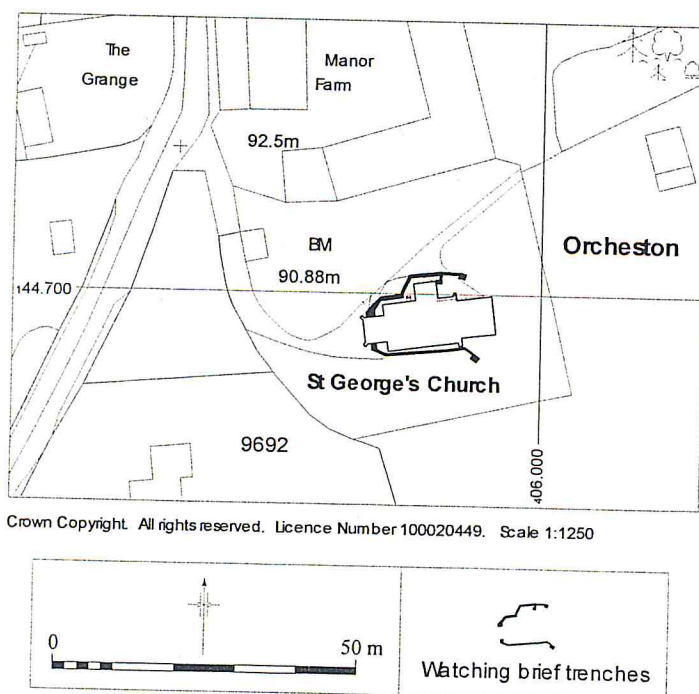


Figure 1. Site location



### 1.3 Archaeological Background

The church is one of two medieval churches in Orcheston. It is of flint and stone with a Norman north door and 13<sup>th</sup> century windows in the nave and chancel. The main windows are Perpendicular, as is the low tower. The chancel is Early English. The Royal Arms are dated 1636 and most of the fittings are Victorian (The Churches Conservation Trust website). Restoration was carried out in 1833 and 1858. It is thought that the nave walls were raised with the roof being made higher and less steep during the former refurbishment. St George's was declared redundant in 1982 and was vested in the Redundant Churches Fund on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1985 (Redundant Churches Fund 1988).

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The drainage work was carried out over the course of two and a half weeks and consisted of two hand dug trenches, one aligned to the north edge of the nave, the other to the south, and two hand-dug soakaways. Both drainage trenches had a length of c.36m and were 500mm deep (Fig. 1). The soakaways were 1m x 1.20m and reached a depth of c.1.80m. Initially parts of both drainage trenches were excavated with an archaeologist present. When it was established that further excavation was unlikely to disturb significant remains, the rest of the trenches were dug without an archaeologist being present. However these trenches were inspected on a further three occasions before they were filled. The excavation of the two soakaways was monitored by an archaeologist.

Disarticulated human remains were collected for reburial within the drainage trenches and soakaways.

The burials encountered were cleaned and recorded. The remains that needed to be disturbed were collected and bagged and reburied on top of the Soakaway 2. No human remains were removed from the churchyard.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

## 3 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. grave cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

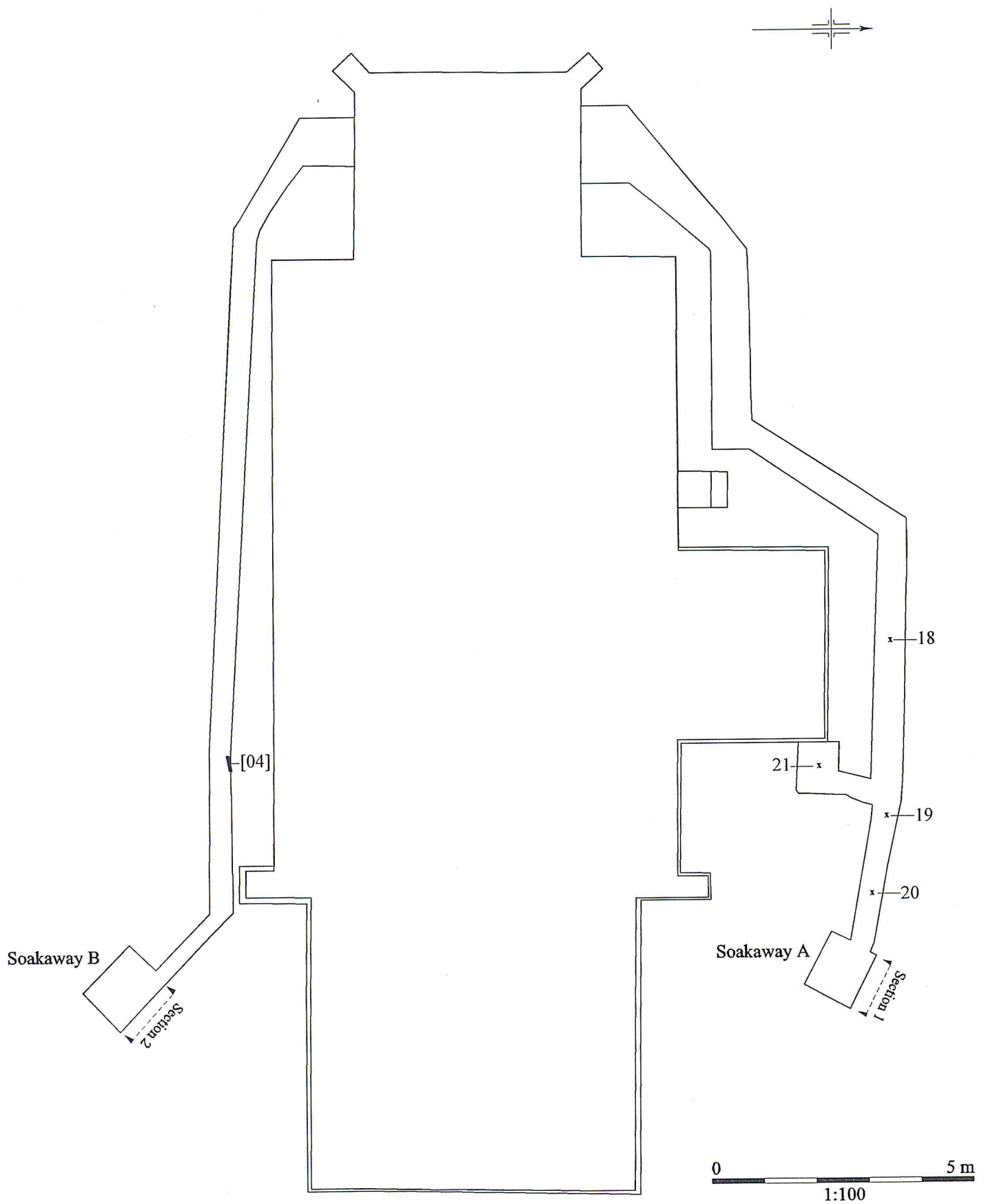


Figure 2. Location of drainage works. *Measured sketch drawing of church.*

### 3.1 Natural geological deposits

The lowest recorded deposit seen in Soakaways A and B comprised a weakly cemented white chalk with 50% content of flint nodules (14). This constituted the natural geology of the site and was seen to slope down slightly from a maximum height of 0.9m below existing ground level in the north (Soakaway A) to 1.20m in the south (Soakaway B).

### 3.2 Soakaway B (Figure 3)

Soakaway B was located to the south of the church

Lying on the natural chalk (or possibly cut into it) was part of an inhumation - Skeleton (12) within grave fill (13), a 200mm thick deposit of compact orange - light brown sandy silt with small chalk flecks and small fragments of flint. The body appeared to be lying on its left side with the upper body appearing to be bent forward. The grave also contained disarticulated bone.

In section grave [10], containing Skeleton (15), cut into the grave fill 13. Given the position of the inhumation 12 it seems that the edge of the grave containing Skeleton 12 was not recognised and that 13 is both grave fill and general graveyard deposit. For Skeleton (15) only the chest, pelvic area and upper legs were present within the soakaway. The fill of grave [10] was loose light-brown silty sand (very slightly clayey) with chalk flecks (11).

Lying above grave [10] was a graveyard deposit of compact light brown-grey clayey loam with 40% flint fragments and chalk flecks (09). This was c. 200mm thick and contained many disarticulated human bones. Above this deposit was a slightly different graveyard deposit of pale grey-brown clayey loam with 20-30% small chalk pieces, occasional larger chalk pieces and moderate amounts of small and medium sized flint (07). Within this last deposit and at a depth of 900mm below existing ground level were parts of two inhumations [08]. The relationship between them could not be determined. The northern burial was represented by two femurs with a displaced pelvis and phalanges between the femurs. To the south was another burial comprising skull and ribs. This appears to have been cut through by the lower grave [12].

The uppermost graveyard deposit was pale grey-brown clayey loam with 10% fine and small chalk fragments and occasional pieces of flint (03). This was c. 250mm thick and was covered by 70mm of topsoil and turf (01).

### 3.3 Soakaway A (Figure 3)

Soakaway A was located to the north of the church.

Cut into the chalk in the north-west corner of Soakaway B was the probable part of the end of a grave [17]. This was filled with orange-brown silty sand (slightly clayey) and contained disarticulated human remains (16). No articulated human remains were within the feature.



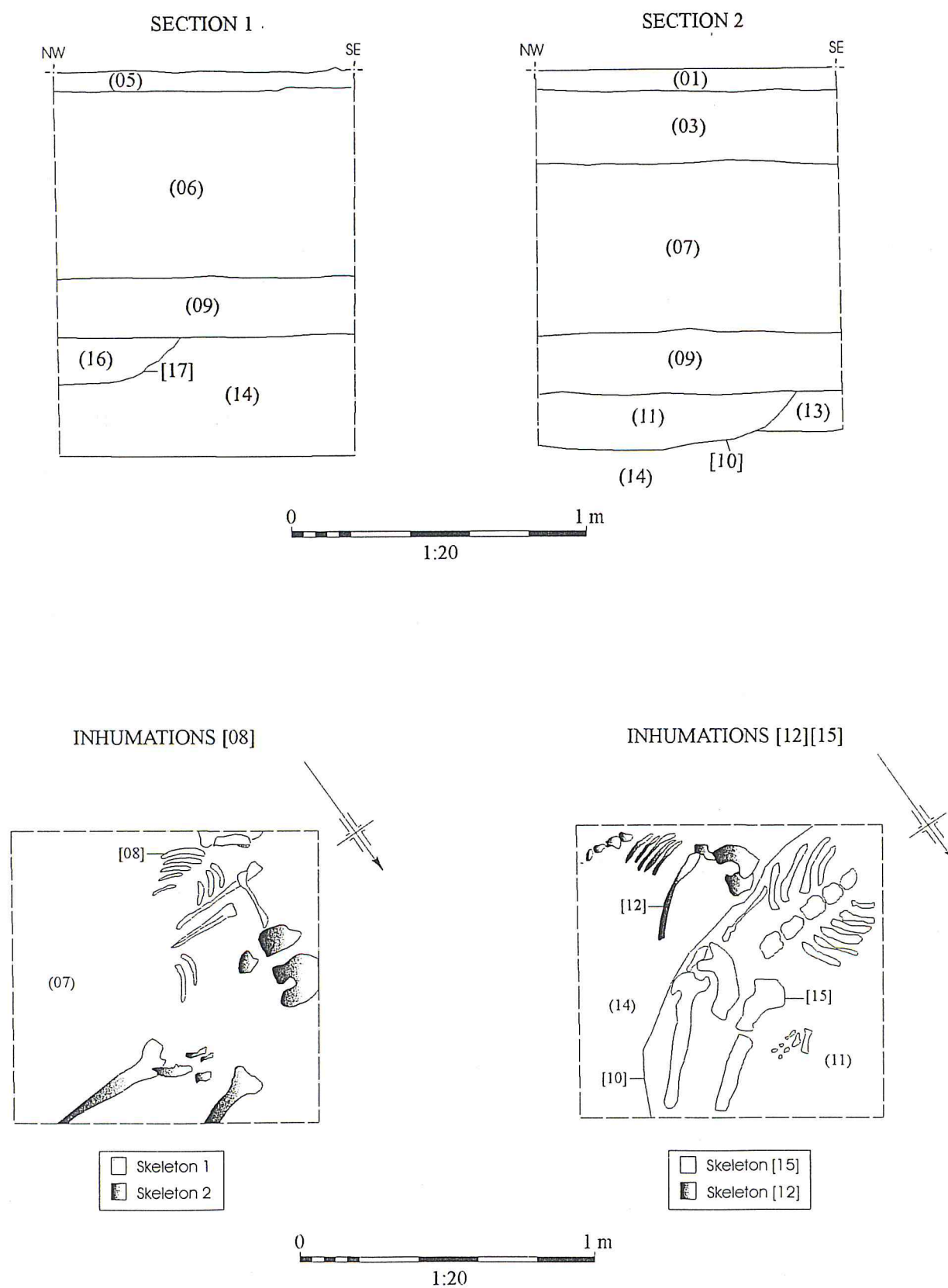


Figure 3. Plans and sections of soakaways.



Above this grave was the same graveyard fill (09) as in Soakaway B, which in turn was beneath graveyard deposit (06). This last was a pale grey brown clayey loam with 20-30% small chalk pieces, occasional larger chalk, and small and medium sized flints. This contained more flint than the uppermost graveyard fill (03) to the south of the church probably as the north side of the church is faced in flint. Deposit (06) was c. 650mm thick and was covered by topsoil and turf (05).

### **3.4 North drainage trench**

The drainage trench along the north side of the church was dug 450mm into graveyard deposit (06).

A child's burial was disturbed just to the east of the north porch (21). A quantity of disarticulated bone (18) by the north door suggests the location of a grave having disturbed an earlier burial(s). Two skulls were disturbed: a skull of an adult (19) was left *in situ* 550mm below present ground level while a juvenile's skull (20) was disturbed 500mm below existing (the remainder of the burial was not disturbed).

### **3.5 South drainage trench**

The trench penetrated 550mm into graveyard deposit (03). A disturbance, possibly connected with refurbishment work, was found extending from the existing drainage by the buttress at the east end of the nave to c. 3.2m to the west. This was represented by a deposit of pale grey-brown clay loam with 5% very small chalk pieces, abundant brick and tile rubble with occasional small stone blocks (02). Part of a vertical-sided cut [04] for it was seen (Fig. 2).

## **4 FINDS**

The only finds seen were the brick and tile rubble in deposit (02).

## **5 DISCUSSION**

As expected several inhumations were encountered. However the majority of the drainage trenches were just above the uppermost level of burials and there was little disturbance of burials. The soakaways showed that burials continue down into the top of the chalk to a depth of 1.05 – 1.20m with several phases of burial. It is common for 19<sup>th</sup> century burials to be deeper than earlier 17-18<sup>th</sup> century ones. It is probable that burial [12], which appears to have cut through the higher burial Skeleton 1 of (08), is of 19<sup>th</sup> century date. However Skeleton 2 of {08} is sealed by burial 15 and is probably medieval in date.

The two soakaways were existing soakaway positions and were deepened. It is probable that the original excavation for the soakaways had disturbed burials higher up. No doubt the deepening of the existing soakaways, and not the excavation of completely new ones, has prevented disturbance of more burials.

The building rubble (02) probably derives from refurbishment work on the church that was buried within the churchyard.

## **6 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Redundant Churches Fund, 1988 Orcheston St George Wiltshire.