



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**AT**

**SQUIRE'S COTTAGE, ST. JOHN'S GREEN,**

**WALLINGFORD, OXFORDSHIRE.**

**NGR SU 6062 8903**

*On behalf of*

*Howard Stewart Ltd*

**JANUARY 2010**

**REPORT FOR** Howard Stewart Ltd  
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## **Summary**

*A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the ground works at Squires Cottage, Wallingford. One 13<sup>th</sup> century inhumation was recorded as well as several other cuts for graves. The inhumation was left in situ.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The site is located on the southern side of Wallingford, south of St John's Road and west of the Thames (SU 6062 8903). The site is currently in use as a garden. The site lies at approximately 48m OD and the underlying geology is shown as River Terrace Gravels

### **1.2 Planning Background**

Planning permission was granted in December 2008 for the construction of a conservatory under the planning reference number P08/W1153. Due to the possibility of below ground archaeological deposits being disturbed during the development a planning condition requiring an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission. This was in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies.

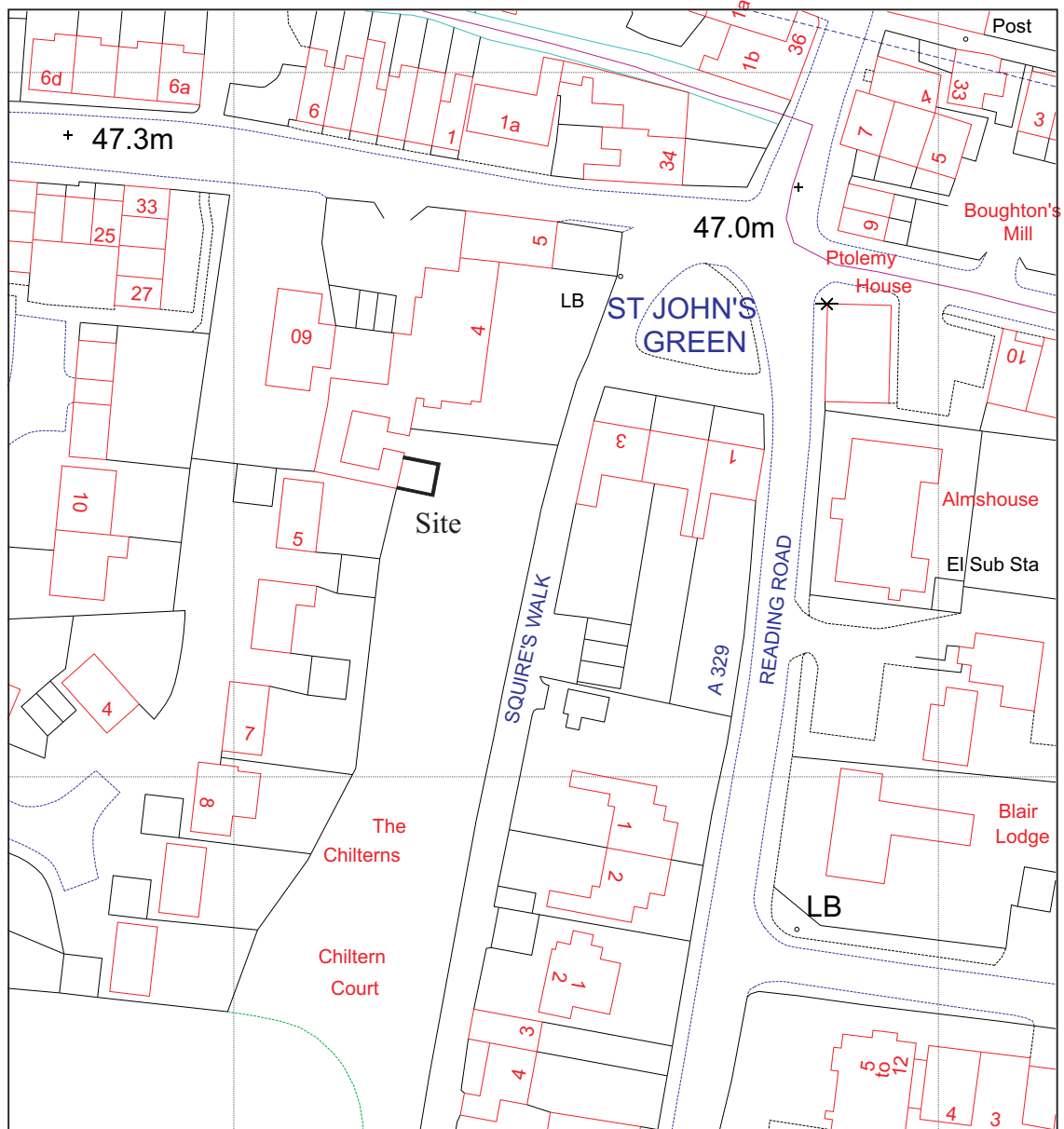
### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The building concerned lies within an area of some archaeological interest located 60m southwest of the location of the South Gate of the Saxon Town (County Historic Environment Record PRN 7797.02, National Grid Reference SU 6065 8910) and located south of the Saxon Town defences (SAM OX234). The site is located 20m south of the site of St John's Hospital, which stood outside the South Gate (PRN 8775, SU 6063 8907). The hospital was founded in 1224 and dissolved c.1547. Rubble masonry wall and other fragments remain incorporated into the existing dwelling. A number of burials have been found in the area of this development site, which are thought to relate to the cemetery of this hospital (PRN 7803, SU 6062 8905). The skeletons were found in a garden near the South West corner of St. John's House, burial ground of the Hospital now the site of Squires Cottage.

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To identify and record any archaeological and historic remains exposed during the course of building operations or construction works on the site.



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Figure 1. Site Location

In particular:

- to record any evidence of earlier medieval remains known to exist in the area

### **3 STRATEGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

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

#### **3.2 Methodology**

An archaeologist monitored the course of the groundwork, which involved the machine excavation of foundation trenches.

### **4 RESULTS (Figure 2)**

All features were assigned individual context numbers. This number covered both the feature cut and the fill for pits, unless the feature was sample excavated by hand. Context numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

The natural geological deposit in the area consisted of a compact yellow-grey sand and gravel (03). Over this was a compact mid orange-brown clay-sand (02) that was between 0.2m and 0.3m thick. This was a very sterile layer and probably represents a subsoil, but could be part of the natural geological sequence.

Cut into this layer were three distinct features. Towards the south of the site, was a cut 07 for a grave. This cut was not fully exposed but was at least 0.5m wide, 1.9m long and at least 0.7m deep with near vertical sides. This cut was filled with a dark brown-grey sandy clay (08) that contained skeleton (09). This skeleton was partially uncovered and recorded. It was then recovered and the depth of the foundation trench decreased so that it was left *in situ*.

To the east of the site was a large pit 10 that was roughly 3m wide and at least 0.8m deep with near vertical sides. It was filled with a dark brown-grey sandy clay (11) that contained disarticulated human bone. It was not fully excavated. There was a considerable amount of tree roots in the area and it is likely that this represents several inter-cutting grave pits rather than a single large pit, although individual cuts could not be identified.

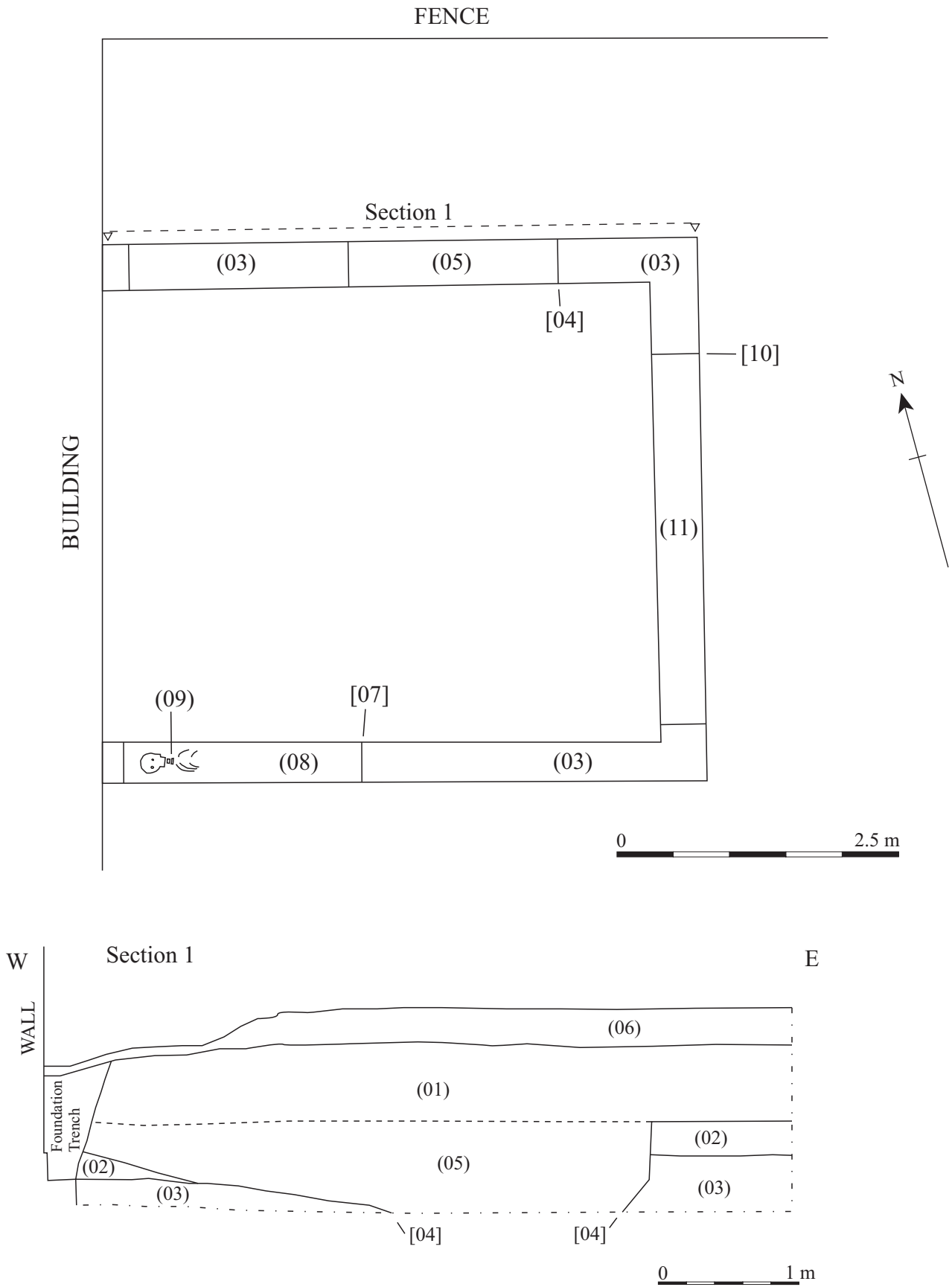


Figure 2. Plan and Section

A large pit 04 was recorded to the north of the site. This appeared to be over 4m long and at least 0.7m deep although it was not fully excavated. The eastern side was near vertical while the western appeared to rise at approximately 30°. The fill was a dark brown-grey sandy clay (05) that contained disarticulated human bone. Again this is likely to actually be at least two inter-cutting graves. It was very difficult to distinguish this fill from the layer above.

Sealing the graves was a layer of dark grey-brown sandy loam (01) containing brick fragments. This layer was on average 0.4m thick and appears to represent a buried land surface.

The uppermost layer up to 0.4m thick was a dark brown-grey-black sandy loam with gravel covered by a thin 0.1m thick topsoil and turf (06). In places it appeared to be banded with brick and tile as if dumped or layered to raise the ground height. Sherds of 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century Mass-produced White Earthen-wares were noted from this layer. These were not retained. Much of this layer had been stripped prior to the archaeological monitoring.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Pottery** (*By Paul Blinkhorn*)

A single sherd of pottery weighing 13g occurred in a grave, context (08). It is medieval Wallingford ware, fabric type WA38 in the Oxfordshire type-series (Mellor 1994), and broadly dateable to AD1050 – 1250. Such pottery is a common find in the town. The sherd is in fairly good condition and does not appear obviously re-deposited. It is undecorated, and most likely from the base of a jar.

### **5.2 Human Remains**

The watching brief located one human inhumation (09) within deposit (08). The skeleton was only partially uncovered. The skull, ribs and several vertebrae were recorded. It would appear to be of a young or small adult.

Small amounts of disarticulated human remains were also been found in deposits (05) and (11). Disturbed, disarticulated skeletal material is of limited scientific value, it is difficult to date and secondly - most scientific work involves relating different types of data to one another at the individual level and with disarticulated material it is not possible to combine data in this way. For these reasons the disarticulated bone is usually not considered worthy of study and regarding the time constrained nature of this watching brief this material was not analysed *in situ*.

### **5.3 Environmental Remains**

No environmental samples were taken due to the nature of the deposits encountered.



## 6 DISCUSSION

At least one identifiable grave (07) with inhumation (09) was recorded. The pottery in the fill of the grave is dated between the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The proximity of St John's Hospital founded in 1224 and the condition of the pottery sherd would suggest that the burial was one of the first associated with the hospital.

Due to the presence of disarticulated human bones within the fill of cuts 04 and 10 it would seem likely that these represent graves as well, with the associated inhumation being below the level of the foundation trench. These are almost certainly contemporary with burial (09).

The inter-cutting graves recorded as 11 would suggest that the area saw considerable use as a cemetery.

## 7 ARCHIVE

### Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper record

The project brief  
Written scheme of investigation  
The project report  
The primary site record

#### Physical record

The finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Institute for Archaeologists, 1994 *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Revised 2008

Mellor, M, 1994 Oxford Pottery: A Synthesis of middle and late Saxon, medieval and early post-medieval pottery in the Oxford Region. *Oxoniensia* **59**, 17-217