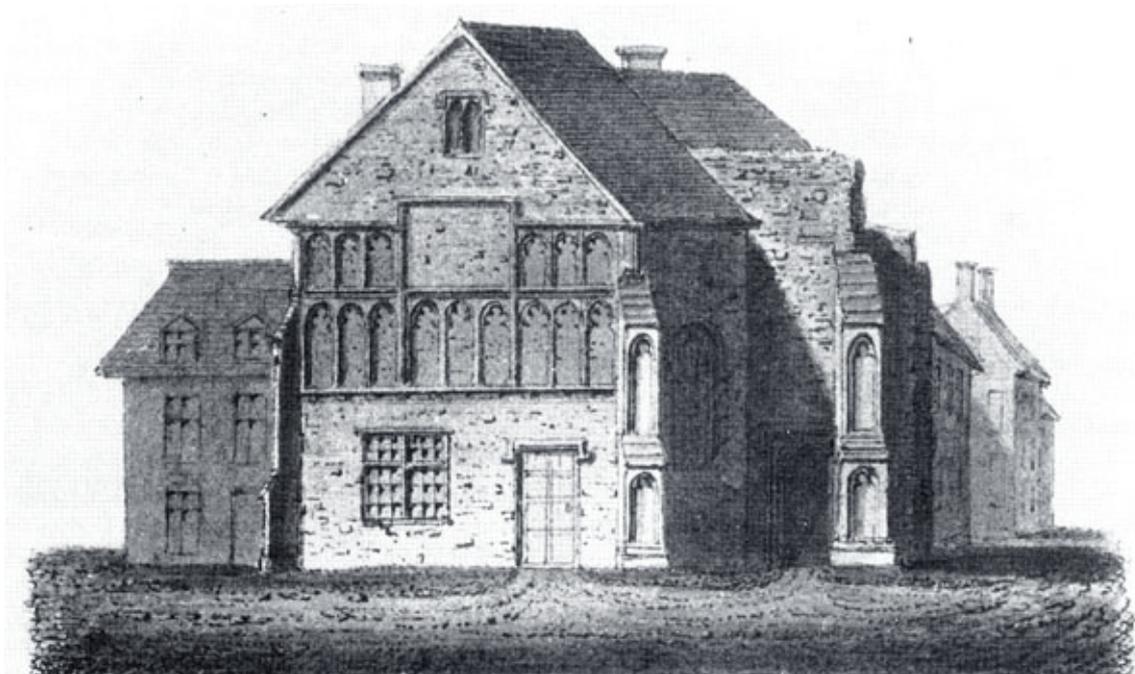


ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

25 Out Risbygate, Bury St. Edmunds BSE 218

A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING, 2003
(Planning app. no. SE/03/2770/P)



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Field Team
Suffolk C.C. Archaeological Service

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Cover illustration: St. Peter's Hospital, from a print by Isaac Johnson (1754-1835).

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Acknowledgements

This project was funded by Mr. D. Sayer and was monitored by R.D. Carr (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Conservation Division).

The fieldwork and finds processing were carried out by Sue Anderson and Kelly Powell from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Team, and managed by Tom Loader.

Summary

The graves of at least twelve individuals were found during an archaeological monitoring of trenches excavated for an extension to the rear of 25 Out Risbygate, Bury St. Edmunds. These were thought to be related to the nearby medieval hospital of St. Peter, now a Nursing Home, and probably indicate that a substantial cemetery existed in the eastern half of the hospital precinct. Possible evidence for a medieval building, perhaps the cemetery chapel, was also identified.

SMR information

Planning application no.	SE/03/2770/P
Date of fieldwork:	14.8.03
Grid Reference:	TL 8451 6444
Funding body:	Mr. D. Sayer

Introduction

An archaeological monitoring condition was requested on planning application SE/03/2770/P for an extension to the rear of 25 Out Risbygate, Bury St. Edmunds (TL 8451 6444, Fig. 1, Site BSE 218). The site is within 100m of a medieval hospital, St. Peter's, thought to be located at St. Peter's Cottage (Site BSE 048). On the OS first edition map of 1887, the site was within the garden of this cottage and was thought likely to be within the precinct of the hospital (Fig. 2). Burials were anticipated.

Unfortunately, excavation of the extension footings was carried out prior to planning permission being granted. The Archaeological Service was informed that trenches were open and available for inspection. On visiting, it was found that several graves had been exposed in section, and that bones had clearly been removed with the spoil and disposed of in a skip.

Historical Background

St. Peter's Hospital was founded by Abbot Anselm in the early 12th century, originally for infirm and leprous priests but also taking in other aged and sick individuals if priests were not available. By the 14th century it was used almost exclusively for lepers. It was dissolved before 1545 (Rowe 1958, p.259).

A drawing of the building was made by Isaac Johnson (1754-1835) and shows a substantial building of 14th-15th century date (Statham 1988, p.70). In the early 19th century, St. Peter's Hospital was recorded as a barn called St. Peter's Barn (shown on Fig. 2), which was still partially enclosed within the remains of the hospital precinct walls (Gillingwater 1811, p.225).

According to Tymms (1849), victims of the 1637 plague were buried at the site, but Statham (1988) suggests that St. Peter's Pits, old lime workings on the north side of the road (BSE 171), were used for this purpose and that the hospital building was only used to accommodate the sick. Harris (1921) recorded the memories of the local 'Oldest Inhabitant', who stated that human bones were often found in the area, and that a large quantity of earth had been imported from the opposite side of the road to cover the ruins of the church which was sited there and to raise the level of the land for building purposes. Harris noted that 600 people died in the 1637 plague, and that 140 of these were buried at St. Peter's Chapel over a period of five months.

Reports by workmen suggest that human skeletons were found when footings were excavated for the Nursing Home at St. Peter's Cottage, 'several years' before 1989, but these were not reported at the time. One skeleton, of a child aged c.9-11 years, was recovered in 1979 (Carr 1979).

Methodology

As archaeological features (graves) were exposed in all of the excavated trenches, all sections were studied for grave cuts and exposed human remains, and then drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trenches had been dug to a depth of 1.0 to 1.2m, and were 0.65 to 0.70m wide. The subsoil was orange sand mixed with yellow chalky clay. Graves were visible as light to dark brown clay-loam fills with occasional chalk and flint, but bright sunlight made it difficult to identify the cuts properly, and the upper levels were indistinguishable from the layer below topsoil. The presence of human remains was used as a guide, and the bones were identified in situ to estimate the approximate positions of the graves. These were later added to a plan (Fig. 3) based on the architect's plan, but modified for changes made during excavation of the trenches by the builders. No bone was collected, and fragments were identified in situ where possible. There were no other finds. Digital photographs of some of the bones were taken (Appendix 1).

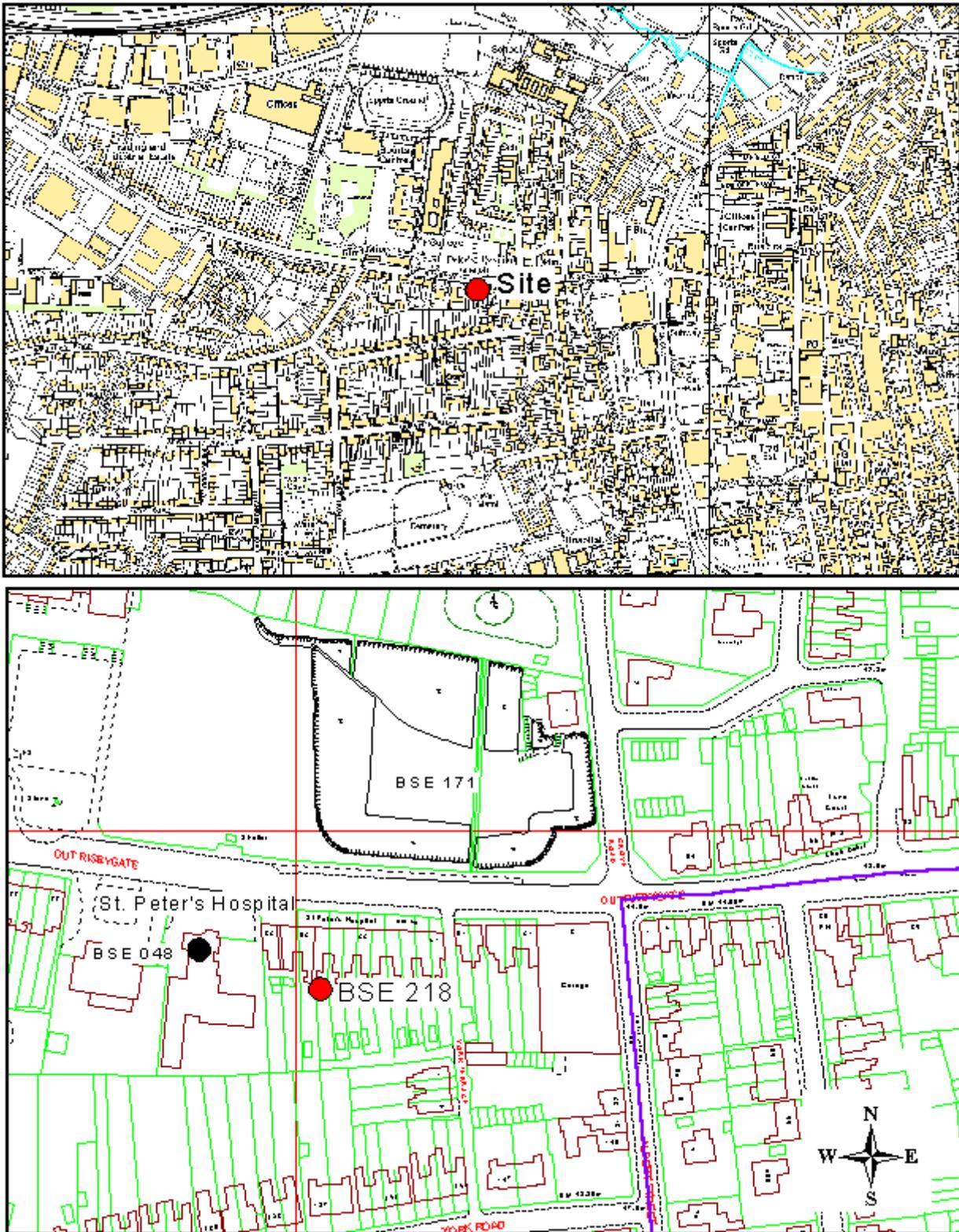


Figure 1. Site location map (1:1250 and 1:200).

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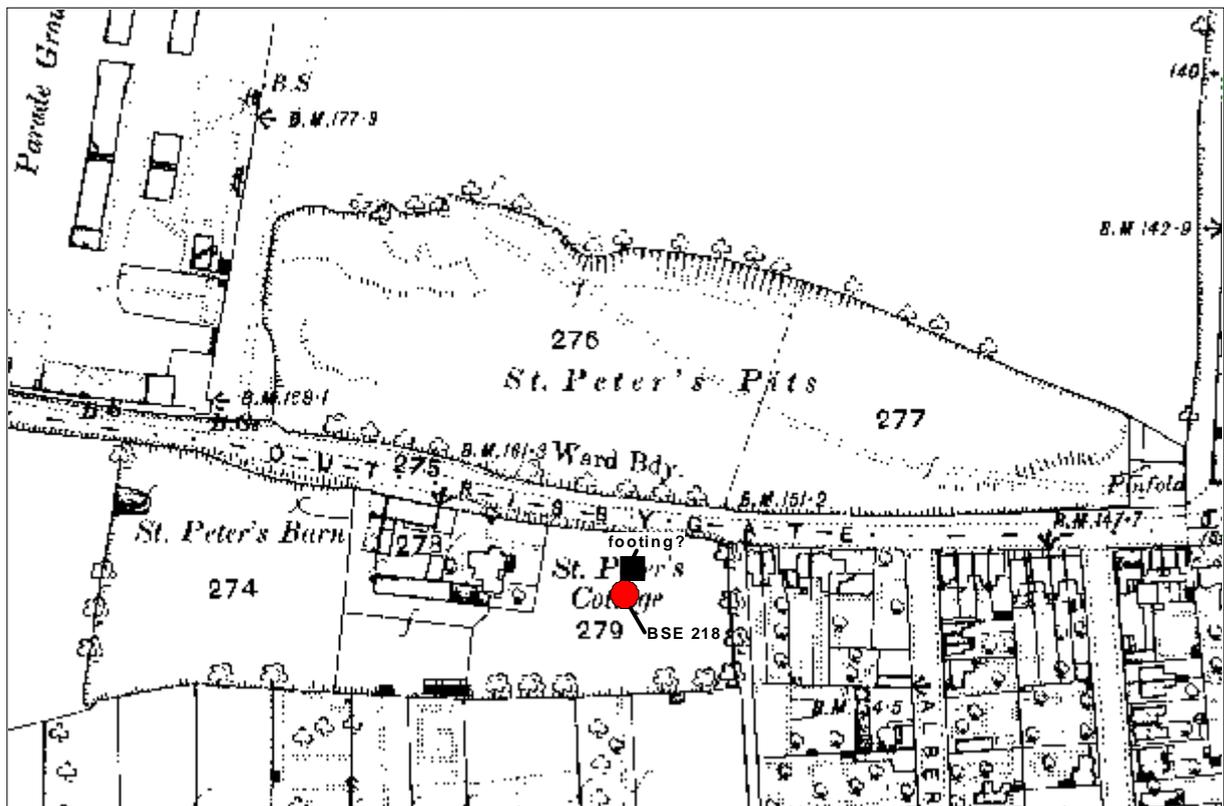


Figure 2. Position of the site on the 1st edition OS map of 1887.

Results

A plan of the trenches showing positions of the main features is shown in Fig. 3 and sections of all trenches are presented in Figs. 4 to 5. The following lists all contexts identified:

- 0001 Unstratified finds (none collected)
- 0002 Grave, shallow V-shaped cut, orange brown clay fill. Lower arm bones exposed in section.
- 0003 Modern square-section cut filled with dark brown loam and ceramic building material (CBM) fragments.
- 0004 Modern post-hole, rectangular-section, containing dark brown loam, CBM and redeposited bone. May have cut a grave, but nothing visible.
- 0005 Grave, shallow U-shaped cut, mid brown clay/loam fill. Section A cuts through pelvis, no bone visible in section J.
- 0006 Grave, shallow U-shaped cut at slightly higher level than others, visible in section J, cut at the knees.
- 0007 Grave, shallow U-shaped cut between 0005 and 0013 in section J, cut at the shin.
- 0008 Grave, at the corner of sections A and B, cut through the middle of the skull and spine, suggesting an E-W alignment. Redeposited bone in topsoil above.
- 0009 Possible grave cut in section E, partially removed by later disturbance which contained redeposited bones. No bone visible in the feature, not planned.
- 0010 Grave, shallow U-shaped cut, adjacent to 0011 but relationship uncertain. Section E cuts humerus. May be NW-SE aligned.
- 0011 Grave, deep V-shaped cut, adjacent to 0010, contains dark chalky brown clay. Ribs were visible in section E to the south side of the cut. May be NW-SE aligned.
- 0012 Grave, adjacent to and lower than 0006, in section J cut at the feet.
- 0013 Grave, at corner of sections I and J. Mid brown clay/loam fill. Ribs visible in transverse section I, and a small hollow probably marked the position of the skull. This cut another possible grave, but the 'fill' was very similar to natural and no bone was seen.
- 0014 Grave, shallow U-shaped cut, north end of section E/F, pelvis cut by section E. May be NW-SE aligned.
- 0015 Possible grave running the length of section G, no bone identified. Relationship with 0010 unknown.
- 0016 Flint, chalk and mortar footing, c.40cm showing in section K Possibly early.
- 0017 Later disturbance to 0016? Contains occasional CBM mixed in with mortar and flint, less structured than 0016.
- 0018 Possible cut for 0016? Mid brown clay loam with chalk fill.

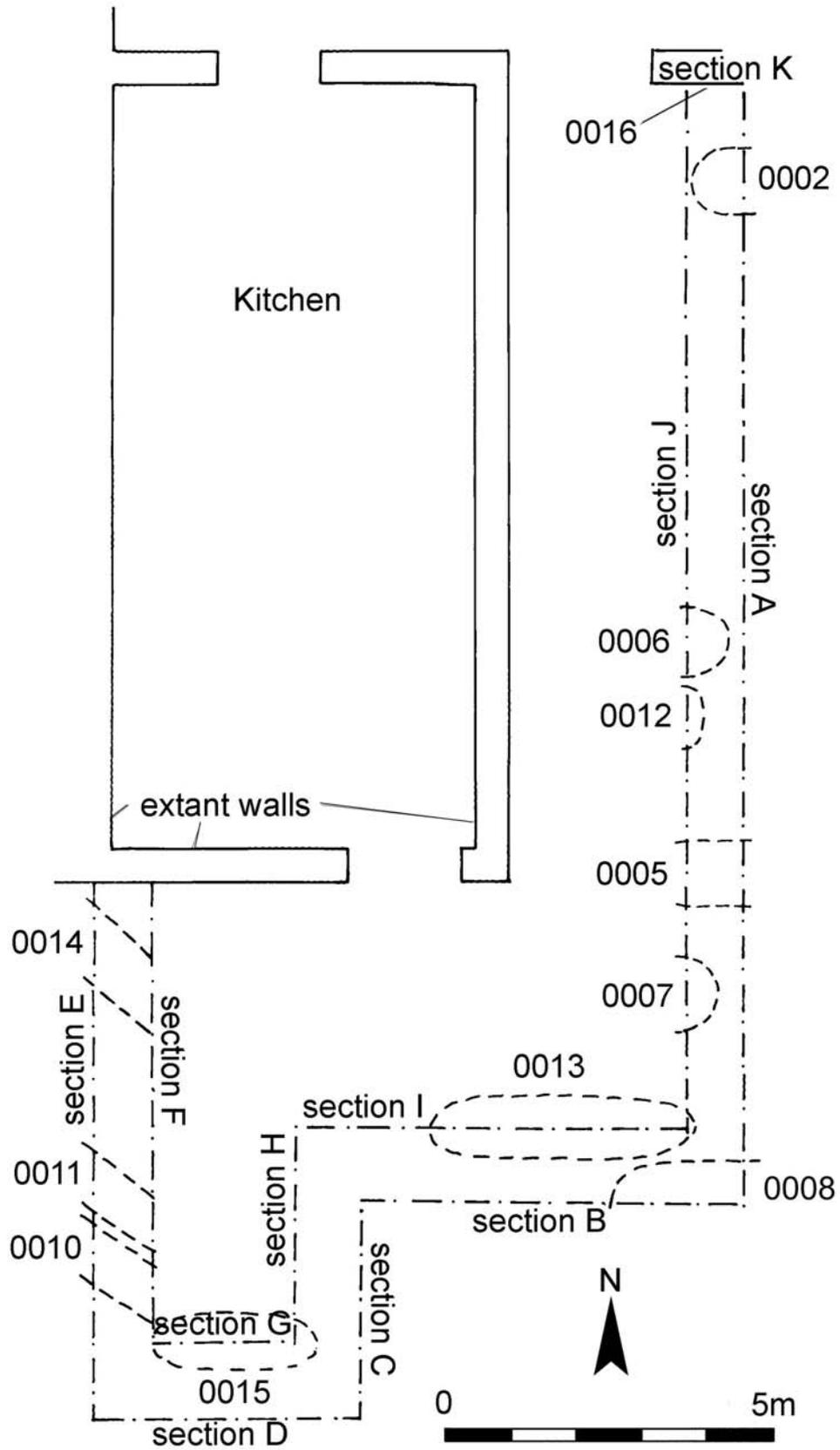


Figure 3. Plan of trenches showing approximate positions of graves (1:100).

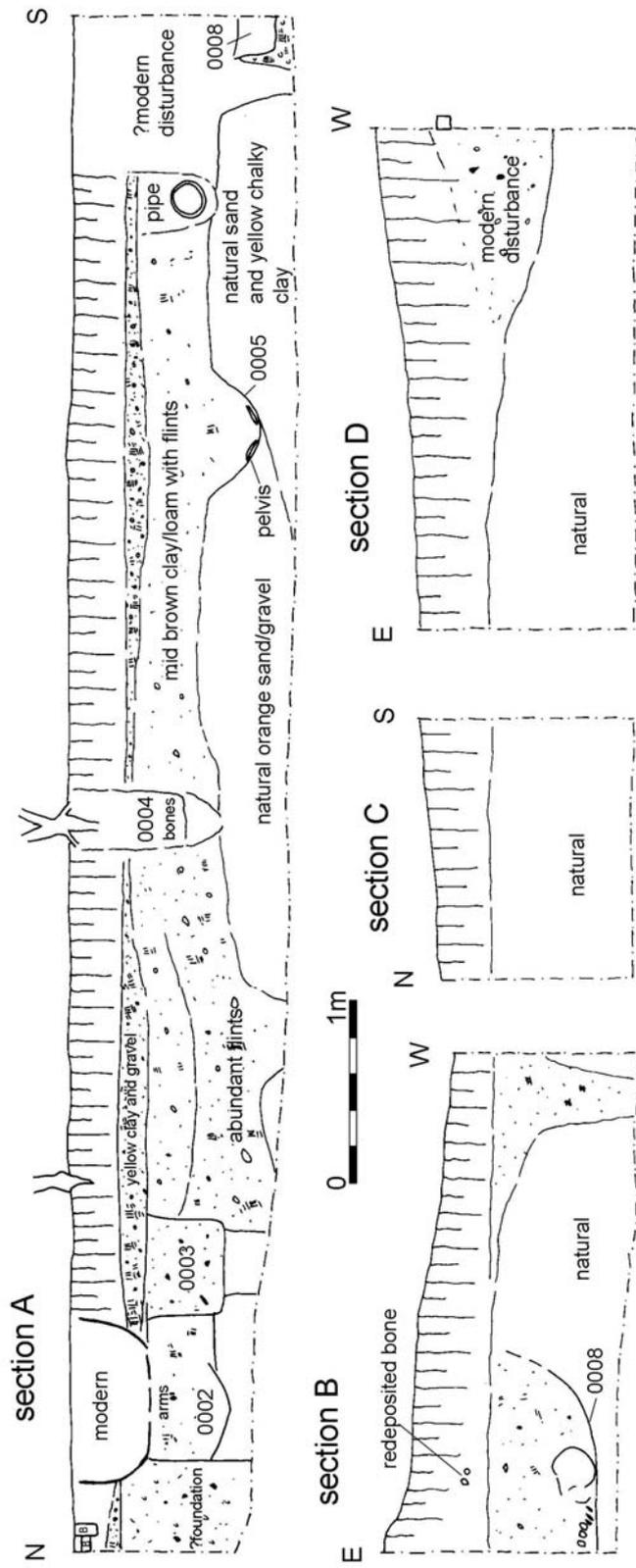


Figure 4. Sections A to D (1:40).

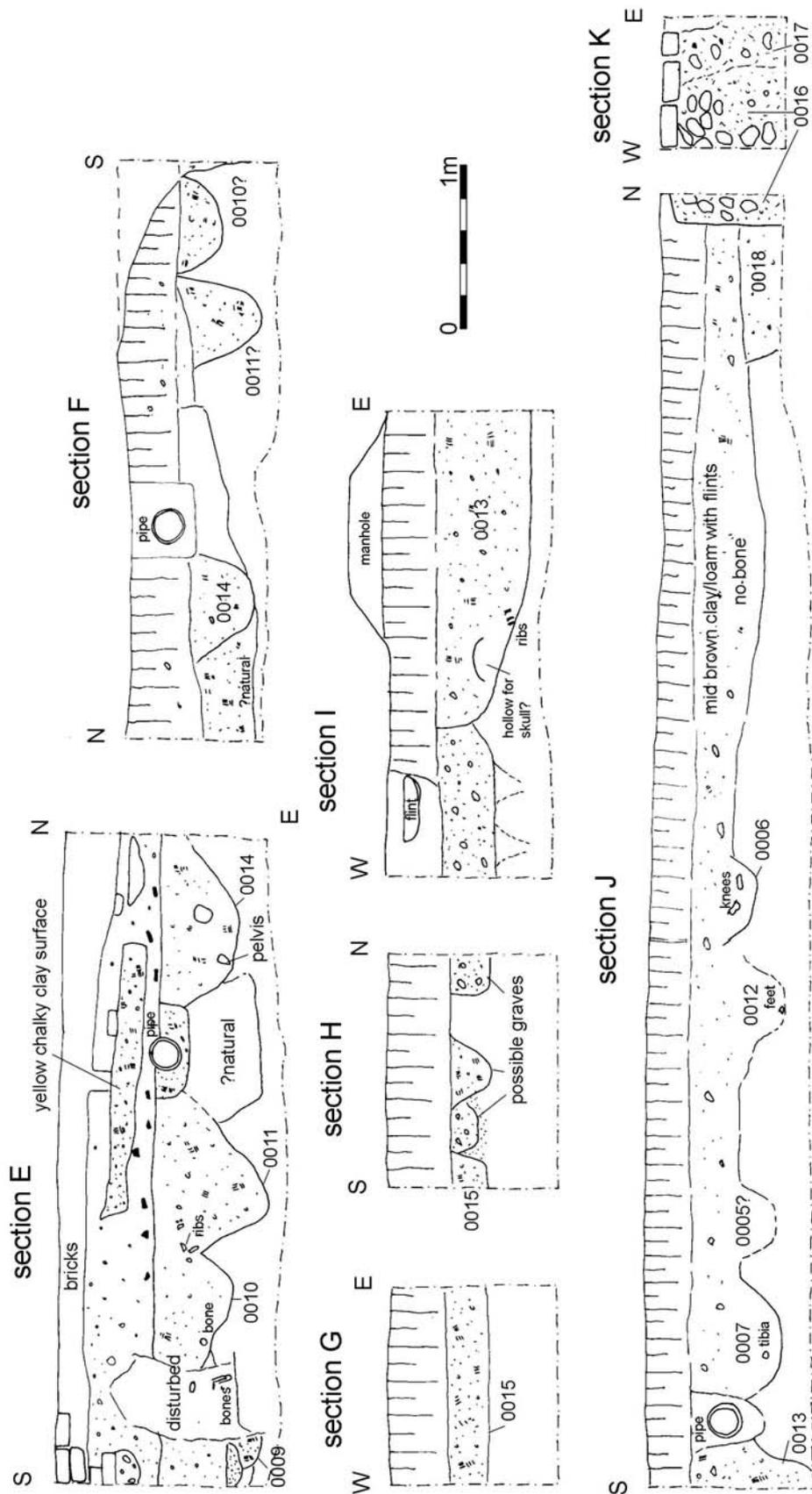


Figure 5. Sections E to K (1:40).

At least twelve graves were identified in the trenches (Fig. 3, 0009 not shown). These were filled with mid brown clay/loam with occasional chalk and generally had shallow U-shaped sections with flat bases (Figs. 4-5). The cuts were plainly visible where they cut the yellow chalky clay subsoil, but less so at the upper levels. A layer of mid brown clay loam with flints appeared to overlie them and probably represented an earlier garden soil. Several areas of modern disturbance (e.g. 0004), particularly along the fence lines in sections A and E, had resulted in the redeposition of human bone and suggested that further graves had been present. All bone identified in section appeared to be adult. Photographs of some of the bodies in situ are included in the Appendix.

The historical evidence shows that St. Peter's Hospital was used partly for lepers. Where possible, the individuals buried here were studied to see if the disease was present. The best indicators would be found in the bones of the face, hands, shins and feet. Only 0008 was assessable for the face, and showed no signs of the disease. The shin bones of 0007 were also free of inflammatory changes.

The only other feature of archaeological interest to be identified was 0016, a small section of a fairly substantial flint, chalk and mortar footing. This appeared to run below and on the same alignment as the original back wall to the house. It may be of medieval date, but had been disturbed and rebuilt with a few tile inclusions at some point.

Discussion and Conclusions

Whilst it is possible that the individuals buried here could be related to the 1637 plague, this seems unlikely. The burials are all approximately east-west aligned with their heads to the west, they are in discrete grave cuts rather than large plague-type pits, and they appear to have been carefully interred. The density of burials found in these trenches, together with earlier reports of finds closer to St. Peter's Cottage, suggests that a substantial cemetery existed to the east of the hospital buildings in the medieval period.

The large flint and mortar footing was an unexpected find. It is at some distance from the road frontage and is unlikely to form part of the precinct wall. The most likely explanation for its presence would be a previously unidentified hospital building, perhaps even a church or chapel.

No evidence was found for the suggestion that 'large quantities' of soil had been deposited over the site before the terrace of houses was built, although it is possible that this had occurred closer to the road frontage.

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Appendix 1. Photographs of bones in situ



Grave 0005, pelvis.



Grave 0008, skull and vertebrae.