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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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for 2005**

Editor Alison Taylor

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Editorial

These Proceedings take us on the usual chronological tour of Cambridgeshire's past, from scant traces of Neolithic occupation at Fenstanton to the impact of 19th century entrepreneurship and 20th century planning on Cambridge's Victorian New Town. As ever, we aim to bring you the most significant results of the latest archaeological excavations, together with the Society's parallel interest in historical and landscape studies. Residents of Cambridge should feel especially well served by the painstaking work represented both in Philomena Guillebaud's reconstruction of the events and effects of enclosure of the West Fields, and Bryan and Wise's analysis of one area of post-enclosure development — as they say, a microcosm of development quite typical of Cambridge in an exceptionally dynamic age. Anthea Jones literally lets the past speak for itself, through the letters of the wife of an Ely bishop, whose domestic concerns were little affected by her husband's daunting ecclesiastical responsibilities.

Outside the normal running of an active local society, CAS has been involved in a peripheral but deeply concerned way with the heritage service (including archaeology, archives and museums) of the County Council. Regular readers will be aware of the concerns we have expressed over the years at what we have seen as a general failure to support excellent staff by providing the right resources. This spring, financial matters became significantly worse, and CAS joined a substantial body of protest which at least postponed for one year one tranche of cuts (worth £100,000). This cut will however go ahead in 2006, leaving Heritage Services to face a 30% budget reduction from £927,000 to £650,000, even though Cambridgeshire is already well below neighbouring counties in funding these services. A consultants' (Kentwood Associates) discussion paper notes among other things that one decision that has caused most damage to the Council's reputation is the abolition of the post of the County Museums Officer, and CAS knows how much John Goldsmith, a vastly effective supporter of local museums since 1975, would be missed (August 2005). They note too that proposed cuts will require far-reaching policy decisions to withdraw from non-statutory services which would have 'a major impact, both for the public directly and on the ability of those services to lever additional — and often substantial — funding from external sources'.

The consultants are particularly flattering about archaeology. 'We believe this to be an outstanding example of a County Council Archaeology Service. Its archaeology and countryside advice services are held in high regard by planners, developers, other local authorities, and regional and national organisations. The service has an enviable track record in obtaining external funding... The outreach programme — particularly work with schools — is exemplary.' The report is concerned that such work is not put at risk, and it is critical of the current short opening hours of the County Record Office, of the County's failure to provide public access to historic buildings information since 2002, and the loss (August 2005) of a valued mentor for small museums. It is also worried that, if a proposed new Historical Resource & Cultural Centre is built with PFI money, there would not be funding to staff it adequately for the hours the public would reasonably expect.

There are clearly frightening times ahead, not least for our small, mostly voluntary, museums. This is very sad at a time when there is so much public enthusiasm for the past and so many new sources that can be tapped if the right support and advice are available. CAS has already filled some gaps, for example by taking responsibility for *Conduit* and publishing 'Recent Fieldwork' without grant support, and we are hoping to reinstate some financial support for local archaeological groups. We will continue of course to co-operate with the County Council through advice, by offering joint working and by fruitful liaison with their over-worked staff. We hope this coming year will see some solutions rather than additional problems, and a better atmosphere of hope and confidence. CAS is certainly willing to give all the support it can.

Just as these *Proceedings* were going to press, we heard the sad news that Rev Prof William Frend had died, at the age of 89. His had been a long and distinguished career (or perhaps series of careers, as theologian, soldier, priest and archaeologist), and he did outstanding work on early Christianity. In his later years in Cambridgeshire he impressed and worried us in turn with his continuing excavations, which were fruitful to the last. He has already submitted the results of this work to CAS for publication, and I am guilty in not having yet edited them for publication. The next *Proceedings* (2006) will include a full obituary for William, with his excavations at Great Wilbraham and accounts of Christian artefacts from Roman Cambridgeshire.

Alison Taylor
Editor

Excavation of Medieval Burials associated with St Neots Priory

Mary Alexander and Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu

with a contribution by Corinne Duhig

Excavations revealed that the earliest feature was a large pit containing burnt daub, infilled before the cemetery developed. A total of 38 graves of probable Late Saxon to medieval date were examined, with a burial population of 44 individuals (21 males, 6 ?males, 1 female, 1 ?female, 3 children, 12 indeterminate). Of particular note was a male burial with a partially fused spine accompanied by a possible surgical support or remnants of a bier. Another grave contained a priest, buried with a base-metal chalice. There is slight evidence to suggest division of the cemetery according to status or chronology.

Introduction

During 1993, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Field Unit undertook an archaeological excavation in advance of a shop extension at Market Square, St Neots (TL 182 602). The new development lay on the south side of the precinct of St Neots Priory, possibly founded in 979–984 and re-founded soon after the Conquest, in the vicinity of a burial ground close to the priory church. The excavation provided an opportunity to test the ideas of CF Tebbutt of the layout of the medieval priory and its Anglo-Saxon forerunner.

Archaeological Background

The Anglo-Saxon Priory

The earliest surviving manuscript to refer to the Saxon priory is the *Liber Eliensis* which relates the story of its foundation based on an earlier Anglo-Saxon foundation charter, stating that the priory was founded c.974 by Bishop Aethelwold: formal foundation and dedication of the priory appears, however, to be more likely to date to 979–984 (Chibnall 1966, 69). In the *Liber Eliensis*, Leofric and his wife Leoflaed requested that the priory at Ely establish monks at Eynesbury. Monks were dispatched from Ely and Thorney, and 18 hides of land endowed. An inventory of English saints

completed in 1020 lists the bones of St Neot at rest at the monastery at Eynesbury (Chibnall 1966, 69).

There is little documentary evidence for the pre-Conquest priory except that its post-Conquest successor, newly founded in 1086, received rights to tithes in the parish which was a common way of compensating a monastery for lands formerly in its possession. Amongst the land pleas for the daughter houses of the Saxon monastery at Ely, however, there are none for land assigned to St Neots, which raises doubts as to the priory's link with Ely and with the account in *Liber Eliensis*. There is no mention of St Neots in Domesday Book, which lends weight to the argument that the pre-Conquest history was manufactured to rival the story of the origins of the priory of St Ivo at Slepe (St Ives).

No certain archaeological traces of a Late Saxon priory have been found in St Neots. Tebbutt's excavation of the post-Conquest priory did not investigate systematically below the medieval buildings and no building located during his excavation date earlier than the 13th century.

The Medieval Priory

The later monastery was re-founded as a daughter house to the Benedictine Abbey of Bec by Richard Fitz Wimarc shortly after the Conquest. A new church was started in 1100 and, in 1113, the priory was formally re-founded. By the 13th and 14th centuries the priory had increased in importance, although by the late 15th century, the complex was in financial difficulties, with many of its buildings in poor repair. This was remedied and the house regained its status before its dissolution in 1539 (Chibnall 1966, 74).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Tebbutt excavated the foundations of the priory. He produced a ground plan with all the standard buildings of a Benedictine foundation located (Tebbutt 1966, fig. 1), the most substantial buildings being the stone-built chapter house, refectory and dormitory. Ten metres north of the postulated line of the priory wall Tebbutt found the rough stone foundations of a large building with a glazed tile roof which may have been the priory



Figure 2. Location of excavation area showing plan of the priory and possible location of the priory wall.

church. Although his idealised plan has been criticised (Haigh 1988), it is still believed that the priory church lay on the south side of the monastic precinct (Spoerry 2000, 155).

One of Tebbutt's most pertinent observations was the presence of Christian burials on both sides of, and beneath, the southern arm of the priory precinct wall (Tebbutt 1956, 83–85 and fig. 2; 1966, 44–45; see Fig. 1). This evidence, coupled with the priory's documented resurgence and an increased number of properties on the market place in the 15th century, led Tebbutt to suggest that the southern part of the priory precinct may have been sold off and/or leased at this time to increase revenues (1956, 86). At least 15 individuals were excavated by Tebbutt, all adults and including two women, at Nos 7, 9 and 11 Market Square in 1954 (Tebbutt 1956, 83 & fig. 2), supplemented by an unspecified number from other observations in the vicinity (Tebbutt 1966, 45). The latter include additional burials of both sexes found on either side of Tebbutt's line of the precinct wall at Barclay's Bank, Boots and Woolworths (Tebbutt 1956, 85). The projected wall line runs just south of the area excavated in 1993 (Fig. 1), the original precinct wall running adjacent to the Market Place some distance to the south.

Watching briefs

Two additional burials, one male and one female, were located during rescue work in 1986 and 1987 on the site of the Waitrose store to the north of Priory Lane (Horton and Wait 1989, 11). Both were in stone coffins with decorated lids which date them to the 13th century. It has been assumed these were benefactors of the priory buried within the cloister, although it appears more likely that they were in fact buried in a building to the east of the transept/chapter house.

In 1989 a watching brief during a sewer line replacement in Priory Lane (Horton and Wait 1989) exposed a number of human burials and disturbed bones as well as remains of a building associated with the priory (Fig. 1). The human remains consisted of three complete males, one female and fragmentary remains of three other males, a female and a child. The group as a whole contained an unusually high number of skeletal anomalies, including extremely rare dental anomalies, degenerative pathologies of age and childbirth, osteoarthritis and dramatic fractures (Duhig in Horton and Wait 1989). Only one burial contained any direct dating evidence, a sherd of St Neots ware dating to the 10th to mid 12th century.

1993 excavations

In 1993, an area measuring approximately 12 x 5m was investigated, divided by a wide, modern concrete foundation running east to west (Fig. 2; Plate 5). Subsequent work entailed rapid excavation of deposits within the areas marked for foundation pads and two connecting crossbeams of the proposed build-

ing. Overburden was generally machined down to the level at which grave cuts were exposed.

The earliest feature was a very large pit (pit 73) between 5m and 6m wide and 1.5m deep, where bottomed. There was *in situ* burning at its base, followed by infilling with clay, chalk rubble, burnt daub and charcoal. The presence of this feature suggests early medieval buildings lay only a short distance from the excavated area.

A total of 38 graves and 44 skeletons or partial skeletons were excavated across the site, overlying the infilled pit. All but two were orientated with their head to the southwest, the others being aligned east to west. In the northern half of the site burials were intensive, with several intercutting each other, while further south the burials were less dense, laid out in rows running northwest to southeast, extending beyond the limit of excavation (Fig. 2). Displacement of bones was exacerbated by later activity. The burials, and the deposits into which they were cut, appeared to have been truncated during the post-medieval period with no remnants of the original ground surface surviving. The average surviving grave depth was 0.47m.

All burials were extended and supine. The grave cuts appeared sub-rectangular on the surface although some narrowed to body width at the base, suggesting shroud rather than coffin burial: a possible shroud clip was discovered with Skeleton 1. Many of the graves to the north, however, had flat or concave bases and sharp corners suggesting coffined burials, although no evidence of coffins survived apart from two nails in the fill of the grave containing Skeleton 7. A stone-lined grave (Skeleton 34) was located in the central part of the site, on its eastern side. Five of the grave cuts, and a possible sixth, were anthropomorphic in plan and curved round the head to form an apsidal niche with corners for the shoulder (eg Fig. 3A). Of these, five were closely positioned in the same row of graves in the central part of the site, with the sixth in the adjacent row to the east (Fig. 2). This is not necessarily significant however, since the skull end of most of the graves in the adjacent row to the west had been truncated.

Of particular interest was Skeleton 6, which had its arms flexed and crossed over the abdomen. Seven large, iron staples (with arm spans of 55 to 65mm) were found in association with this burial: three under the spine, two under the pelvis and two under the right leg (Fig. 3B & C). The grave cut was wide and sub-rectangular, with steep slightly concave sides and a gradual break of slope to a flat base. Three sherds of pottery dated to 1000–1200 were retrieved from this grave. The iron staples are particularly interesting and may be linked to the osteological condition of the individual which displayed signs of osteoarthritis and severe spinal problems (see Duhig and further discussion below).

Skeleton 8 (Fig. 3D) was buried with a small base-metal vessel with a pedestal base, found above the ribs on the right hand side. This vessel may be a chalice (see below), its presence indicating a priest

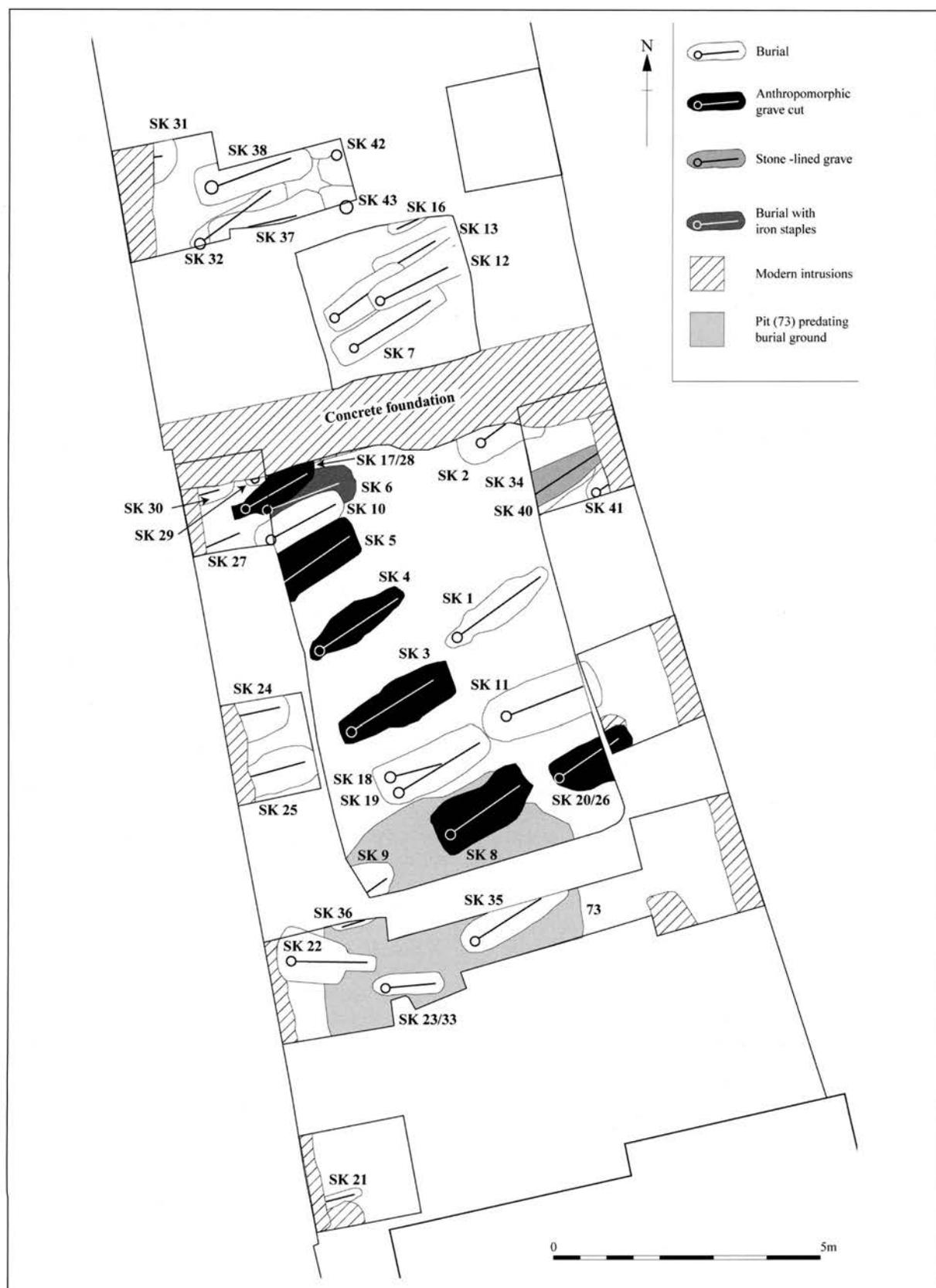


Figure 2. Burial ground revealed during excavations at the rear of 25-27 Market Square in 1993.

burial.

Following ground reduction, the graveyard was sealed by a metre of mixed redeposited material consisting of a yellowish brown and dark yellowish brown sandy clays and gravels, dating from the post-medieval to modern periods.

The human bones

Corinne Duhig

Ages range from 9 to 50 years with a peak at age 40, although this is to some extent an artefact of the ageing methods available. The majority died in mature adulthood, rather than as children, adolescents, young adults or older adults. Three immature/child burials were recorded. One female and one possible female were present, but the disproportion of the sexes is so extreme that it probably excludes the possibility that the excavation touched upon a secular burial ground.

Only two burials are discussed in detail here, with summary details of the remaining burials appearing in Table 1 (full details are given in Alexander 1994). Skeleton 6, buried with a set of iron staples, was near complete, with only a few bones of the extremities missing (Fig. 3.B). The skeleton shows a majority of male features in skull and pelvis. The age band determined from the condition of the pubic symphysis is very wide – 23 to 59 years – but the attrition of the molar teeth is considerable and falls into the 45 plus category. Dental health is poor, although surprisingly this man had not lost any teeth during life. His teeth are very carious, four tooth crowns having been totally destroyed. His stature, if he stood upright (see below), was about 166cm.

The man's spine is fused in two areas: a group of seven thoracic vertebrae and a pair of lumbar vertebrae have both the bodies and the facet joints ankylosed, fixing the curves of the spine. The bodies are not joined by the thick growths of 'flowing bone' which were seen in another individual (Skeleton 5), but their contours are squared off so that the fused vertebrae form a block. These features are diagnostic of a sero-negative spondylo-arthropathy (Rogers *et al* 1987), but it is difficult to equate the condition of this skeleton with the other diagnostic features of these disorders, in which sacro-iliac changes and a regular development of bony ankylosis (ankylosing spondylitis) or erosion and areas of fluffy, periosteal new bone (eg Reiter's syndrome and psoriatic arthropathy) might be expected. Certain infections and long-lasting gastro-intestinal disorders also cause changes similar to those described and are currently being investigated, although the one that is apparently most likely, brucellosis, can probably be excluded because lytic lesions in the vertebrae are not visible radiographically (Ortner & Putschar 1985). There are, however, developments of lateral osteophytes on the bodies of some other vertebrae, combined with cysts in the joint surface, which are indicative of osteoarthritis, so that this condition is present in addition:

this is unsurprising given the age of the individual and the severe primary changes in the spine.

Skeleton 8, presumably that of a priest, consisted of a near complete burial, with only eleven ribs on each side (Fig. 3.D). Most of the features of the skull, pelvis and long bones are indicative of a male, except for the nuchal area and sciatic notch, which appear to have a female form. This individual, having much wear on the molar teeth and falling into Brothwell's category 3, was approximately 35 to 45 years of age. This band is not contradicted by the pubic symphysis ageing (23–59). There is no degenerative arthritis in the spine whatsoever, and this is almost certainly present to some degree in those over 35. There are no pathological changes in the bones, apart from one well-healed rib fracture. This man's stature would have been low, even for this group, at 163cm (5' 4").

By contrast, dental disease is present in the form of caries, both occlusal and interdental, an abscess cavity, alveolar recession over the whole dentition and one tooth lost ante-mortem. The calculus present in moderate and severe degrees in both jaws shows one cause of periodontal problems, resulting from poor dental hygiene. The upper lateral incisors are both absent; there is no space for them in the tooth row and no indication of their loss in life. It is assumed that they were congenitally absent.

Amongst the total excavated population, the lowest in the range of heights is for a woman, 160cm. The range for men is 163cm to 192cm (approximately 5'4" to 6'2"), Skeleton 34.1 being 8cm taller than the next tallest.

Prevalence of dental disease of this group was high (55% one or more teeth missing, 52% at least one abscess cavity, 45% at least one carious tooth). In the total population, the percentages are 5.3% carious teeth, 4.3% abscessed sockets and 10% ante-mortem tooth loss. Compared with Brothwell's (1972) figures for change in frequency in dental disorders, the caries figure is low: carious teeth in his medieval sample were more than 20%. Almost all persons in the St Neots group had alveolar recession indicative of periodontal disease.

The teeth of five individuals (Skeletons 2, 18, 20/26, 23/33 and 43) are hypoplastic, Skeletons 20/26 and 23/33 having pitted as well as linear hypoplasia. Hypoplasia appears in the developing teeth as a result of many physical problems, but principally of starvation or severe infection and is prevalent in poor communities (Hillson 1986). Is possible the three adults were disadvantaged in childhood, when permanent teeth were developing.

Only one individual below the age of 35 appears to have been affected by arthritic changes, 35 being generally the minimum for osteophytic lipping of the spine.

Pathological conditions show that at least some of the individuals had had severe dietary or other environmental stress in childhood, but the great stature achieved by four men implies that these were far from nutritionally compromised in youth. As adults, certainly one, and perhaps two, men had a disorder

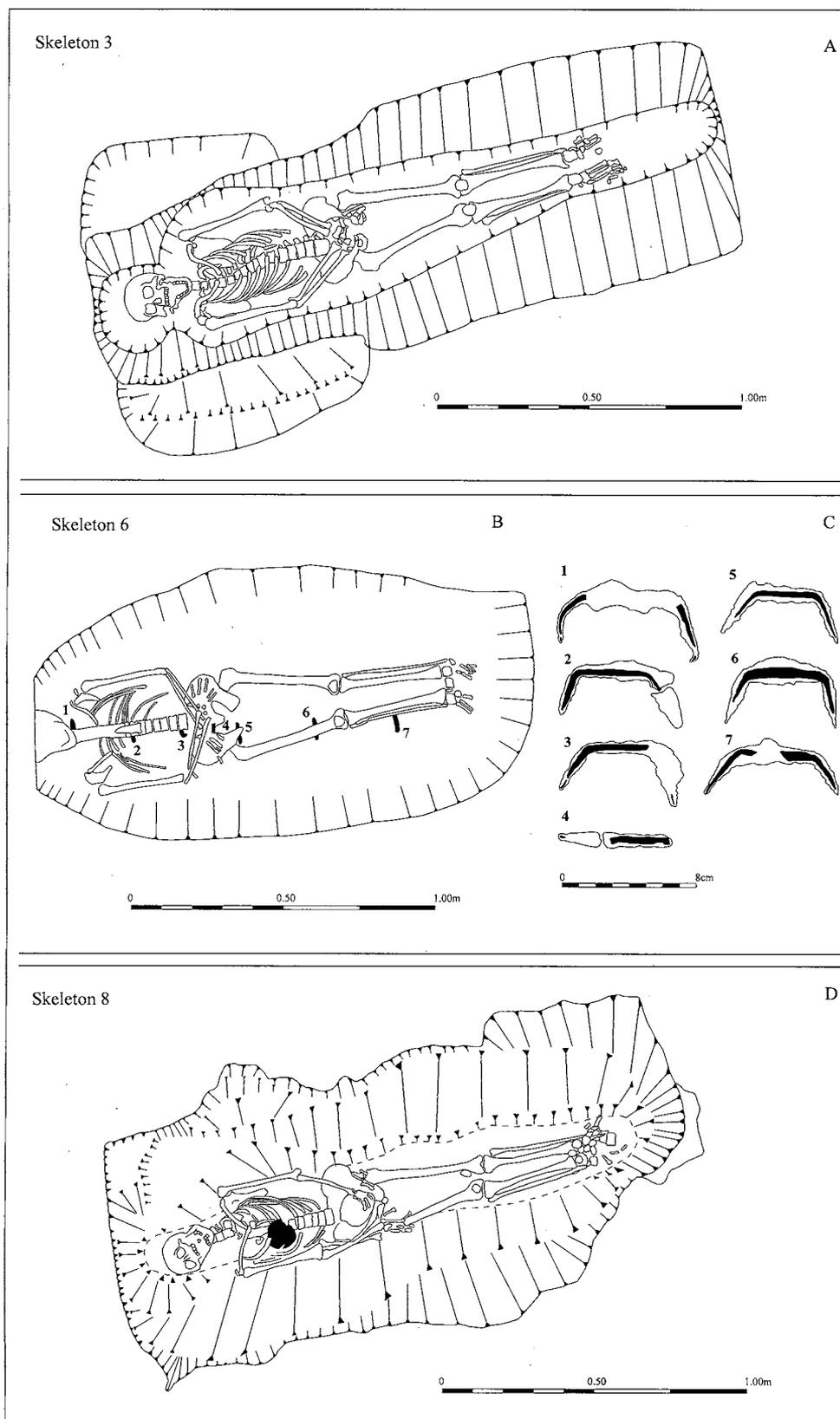


Figure 6. A: Skeleton 3 within an anthropomorphic grave cut
 B: Skeleton 6, with iron staples beneath the spine and the right leg
 C: Detail of iron staples associated with Skeleton 6
 D: Skeleton 8, ?priest burial with base-metal chalice within an anthropomorphic grave cut

Table 1. Summary of human remains.

Skeleton	Sex	Age	Stature	Pathology/comments	Teeth/dental disease
1	M	c.18	c.183cm (6')	Fifth lumbar vertebra has collapsed, possibly the result of occupational stresses.	One second molar crown destroyed by caries.
2	M	c.45–50	unknown	Degenerative arthritis throughout spine and joints of shoulder, elbow and wrist.	
3	M	young/ mature	c.169cm (5'6½")	Ossification on right femur, possibly from repeated stresses to muscle.	Slight alveolar recession in mandible. Eight upper teeth marked with hypoplastic lines (indicating dietary or other systemic stress).
4	M	c.35–45	c.172cm (5'8")	Skull plagiocephalic; longer from front to back on right side. Slight osteoarthritic changes in spine, hips and knees. Considerable development of <i>deltoid</i> of left humerus; not uncommon.	Dental health fairly poor; including five teeth lost ante-mortem.
5	M	c.40–45	c.167cm (5'5½")	Two groups of thoracic vertebrae fused in spine; changes suggestive of condition of DISH (diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis; Rogers <i>et al</i> 1987)	Very poor dental health; teeth encrusted with calculus. Twelve teeth lost ante-mortem; six others with cavities at roots, two worn down to roots.
6	M	c.45+?	c.166cm	See text	
7	M	c.25	c.174cm	Schmorl's nodes on 10 of lower vertebrae, possibly caused by the stresses of carrying heavy weights. Four right ribs broken in life and well-healed.	Caries, calculus and severe alveolar recession.
8	M?	c.35–45	c.163cm (5'4")	See text	
9/36 10	U C	unknown c.13	unknown unknown	Undiagnostic infective condition of foot bones.	
11	M	c.25–35	c.173cm	Slight <i>cribra orbitalia</i> in left orbit, probably indicating an anemic condition.	
12	M?	c.45–50+	c.170cm	Dental disease includes a tooth with two apical abscesses, one of which had penetrated into the maxillary sinus; resultant infection could even have led to death.	
13	F?	unknown	unknown	Ossification into the <i>brachialis</i> muscle of the left humeral shaft due to strong action of that muscle.	
14	C	c.13–14	unknown	Three non-metric traits in the skull. Stage 3 <i>cribra orbitalia</i> in the eye orbits.	
16	M?	c.17–18	unknown		
17/28	M	c.25–35	c.172cm (5'8")	A small (c.9mm) round indentation on left side of the skull may result from injury with a pointed weapon or other object.	
18	M	c.50+	c.172cm (5'8")	Various pathological and non-metric changes present; fracture of left clavicle; new bone (osteoarthritis) on right acetabulum, distal right femur and cervical vertebrae; Schmorl's nodes on sixth thoracic vertebra; ossified costal elements on both first ribs; persistence of metopic suture; thoracic form, with rib facets, to first lumbar vertebra.	
19	M	c.35	c.172cm (5'8")	Anomaly of lower vertebral column: Schmorl's nodes on nine lower vertebrae; anaemia suggested by stage 3 <i>cribra orbitalia</i> .	
20/26	M?	c.17–25	c.172cm (5'8")	Skull is plagiocephalic.	
21	U	unknown	unknown	Osteophytic lipping indicating arthritis of ankle and toe bones.	
22	M	c.50–59	c.176cm (5'9")	Lipping on body of fourth lumbar vertebra.	

Table 1 con't. Summary of human remains.

23/33	C	c.9 (± 1 year)	unknown	<i>Cribra orbitalia</i> in both orbits indicating iron deficiency anaemia at time of death.	Severe hypoplasia indicating starvation or infection during enamel development period in childhood.
24	M	adult	c.182cm (5'11½")	Possible DISH (see sk. 5 above) on basis areas of tendinous insertions exhibiting new bone development, but absence of spine makes certain diagnosis impossible.	
25	M?	unknown	c.174cm (5'8½")		
27	U	c.17-18	unknown		
29	M	c.25-35	unknown		Three molar crowns with caries; three abscesses, the cases of ante-mortem tooth loss. Poor dental hygiene.
30	U	c.12	unknown		
31	U	adult	unknown		
32.1	M	c.40-50	c.175cm (5'8¾")	Arthritic manifestations in spine and new bone development at the tendinous insertions of the patella and calcaneus.	
32.2	U	unknown	unknown		
34.1	M	adult	c.192cm (6'2")		
34.2	equates with 34.1?				
35.1	M	c.50+	c.176cm (5'8")	Changes to the spine indicate degenerative arthritis.	Nearly 69% of teeth lost ante-mortem. High percentage of caries and several abscess cavities.
35.2	M	unknown	c.169cm (5'6½")	Spur of bone near head of left fibula caused by indeterminate muscular action.	
37.2	F	c.40+	c.160cm (5'3")	67% of spine affected by degenerative arthritis.	Extreme underbite (cf sk. 41)
39	U	unknown	unknown		
40	M	unknown	c.182cm (6')		
41	M	unknown	c.182cm (6')	Scoliosis (twist to spine) produced by wedging of four of middle thoracic vertebrae.	Extreme underbite.
42	M	unknown	unknown	'Healed' <i>cribra orbitalia</i> in eye orbits. Three uppermost thoracic vertebrae have osteophytic lipping.	
43	U	c.25-35	unknown		Linear form of enamel hypoplasia on 8 teeth, showing physical stress in childhood.
44.1	U	c.25	unknown	New bone on and adjacent to proximal spine, indicative of indeterminate stress.	
44.2	U	c.17-18	unknown		
45	M?	unknown	unknown		

associated with luxurious living (diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (DISH); Rogers *et al* 1987; Table 1).

Discussion

Possible locations for the Late Saxon monastery and its relationship to the position of the later priory foundation have recently been reconsidered (Spoerry 2000). Despite expectations at the outset of the excavation, the 1993 work provided no evidence to progress debate about the location of the 10th-century priory.

The character of the material within the large pit which pre-dated the burials may imply pre-Conquest occupation in the immediate vicinity, although the date of the feature remains uncertain. The pit, which lay at the southern end of the site, contained burnt wattle and daub as well as unburned clay. Use of such building materials was common in this area during the Late Saxon period and has been found at Eaton Socon (Addyman 1965) and at the settlement next to Church Street (Addyman 1973). It continued in use into the early post-Conquest period, whilst solid clay walls were found in an early 12th-century building at Eynesbury (Tebbutt 1960).

The recent excavation has provided important new evidence for the priory graveyard, the excavated population of which, when combined with previous observations, amounts to at least 70 individuals, of which 39 (56%) have been identified as male or probably male, 6 as female (8%), 4 (6%) as immature/children and 21 (30%) indeterminate.

A discernable change in grave shape occurred in the northernmost burials, where there was a prevalence of coffined burials, a cluster of anthropomorphic graves lying further south (see below). The stone-lined grave also lay in the northern half of the site. Similar graves were found in Priory Lane to the north, where one of the burials was also capped with stone slabs (Horton and Wait 1989). It is possible that the change in grave cuts towards the north of the 1993 excavations may signify higher status, with more elaborate burial rites nearer the priory buildings. The stone coffins of two wealthy individuals discovered beneath the priory itself tend to confirm this hypothesis. Alternatively, the differences in morphology of graves may be chronological, since there is no conclusive dating evidence that the burials to the south and the north are contemporary. Only small amounts of 10th- and early 13th-century pottery were found in the grave fills and the burials can only be a very broadly dated to between 10th century and the post-medieval period of ground raising.

The prevalence of unlined anthropomorphic grave cuts at Market Square, St Neots is particularly noteworthy (5 or 6 examples; 16% of the excavated graves). This grave type occurs throughout the Late Saxon and medieval periods, reflecting the importance of head position which increased in the 9th to 12th centuries (Daniell 1997, 180): although most evident in stone coffins, the practice also occurred in

stone- and mortar-lined graves as well as in the shape of simple grave cuts. Examples of anthropomorphic stone-lined graves are known at many Anglo-Saxon and Norman cemeteries, as at Brampton, Oxon (Blair, unpublished, 34 and fig. 20) and Norwich (Bown and Stirland, in prep.; Bown, 1997, plate 1; Shepherd Popescu forthcoming). Few parallels for the earth-cut type exemplified by the St Neots graves have yet been published, although the form does not appear to have been uncommon and has been recorded as late as the mid 14th century (Barney Sloane, pers comm). At the Augustinian Priory of St James, Bristol the prevalence of the type was 28% (Barney Sloane, pers comm), while at the Cistercian Abbey of St Mary Stratford the prevalence was c.6% (Barber *et al*, in prep.). Similar examples are known from other monastic sites including the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene, Partney, Lincolnshire (Atkins in prep.) and Bermondsey Abbey, London (Steele in prep.). Such graves may have been sealed with planks, as demonstrated by the burials at Partney.

Of specific interest amongst the St Neots burials is Skeleton 6 (currently on display at St Neots Museum), interred with a group of iron staples which have a range of possible interpretations. They may relate to alleviation of a severe affliction of the spine, possibly forming part of a surgical support or substantial walking stick. They may originally have lain under the body encasing organic materials (wood and/or leather?) which have left no other trace, their discovery 'around' the bones perhaps relating to post-depositional movement. Interpretation as a 'pilgrim staff' (see Daniell 1997, 167) does not seem probable in this instance. Cases of medieval 'medical' treatment are rare, with only one certain and one possible case known, both from monastic contexts (Daniell 1997, 173–174). The positive example, of a man's knee with attached copper plates comes from a monastic cemetery in York while the less certain example is from the Welsh monastery of Llandough where a skeleton of uncertain date was found with two iron bands around its waist. In this instance the iron bands were held about 20mm apart by a wooden strut and were perhaps the stiffening inside a broad surgical leather truss to support a spinal complaint (Denison 1995, 4).

An alternative suggestion is that the St Neots staples may relate to a support placed beneath the corpse for burial. In this case, the staples could have formed an iron-bound support for a decomposing body to enable it to be dressed, laid out and coffined without collapse (Corinne Duhig, pers comm). It is perhaps a bier made from planks, the type of staples possibly indicating reuse of timbers from a boat/vessel (see Gilchrist and Sloane, in prep. for further discussion of this possibility and broad parallels).

On the basis of comparable examples the base-metal vessel associated with Skeleton 8 is a chalice, a copy of that used for celebrating mass and denoting the burial of a priest. Burial with a chalice is one of the most common symbols of status and belief and it has been suggested that some may have been buried

containing consecrated wine, although this may be more likely for earlier burials (Daniell 1977, 170).

Overlying the cemetery at Market Square the substantial dump of re-deposited material probably represents ground raising operations which took place periodically between the 16th and 19th centuries to alleviate flooding in St Neots (Tebbutt 1956). Truncation of the underlying deposits may have taken place at this time.

Findings are held at the county stores at Landbeach under the site code STN MS 93.

Conclusion

The excavation provided new evidence about the character of the cemetery of St Neots Priory, although no new evidence for any Anglo-Saxon forerunner of the priory itself. The low proportion of female and child burials here seems to argue against its use as a parish cemetery, although a few burials of both women and children have been found in the surrounding area.

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