

CHAPTER 14

THE DOG ASSEMBLAGE

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A total of 503 fragments of dog bone was recovered from:

Period 3

Pits (SE)	Object 500017	19
Pits (N)	Object 500029	7
SE Layers	Object 701	118
MB 1	Object 50018	3
MRTB 1/ERTB 1 [=ERTB 4]	Object 50037	24

Period 4

Pits (SE)	Object 500017	186
SE Layers	Object 700	128
MB 3	Object 50046	18

THE ASSEMBLAGE BY CONTEXT

PERIOD 3 (FIG. 126)

Northern pits (Object 500029)

Dog remains were recovered only from pit 4835. This pit yielded two metacarpals and one metatarsal (5835), a scapula, ulna and skull fragment (5867), and a single neonate humerus (4832). The proximally unfused ulna indicates an animal of less than 32 weeks of age.

South-east pits (Object 500017)

Pit 5039

Only three fragments were recovered, a metatarsal (4549), tibia (4535) and cervical vertebra (4542). The unfused proximal ulna again suggests an animal under the age of 32 weeks; the metatarsal and tibia both exhibit skinning marks.

Pit 5693 (16 fragments)

The remains suggest the presence of two dogs, and are predominantly from context 6300. With the exception of one mandible with early adult dentition, all the remains are of limb bones of which one (tibia) exhibits a skinning mark. Epiphyseal fusion indicates that one animal was less than 40 but older than 24 weeks, and the other less than 32 weeks.

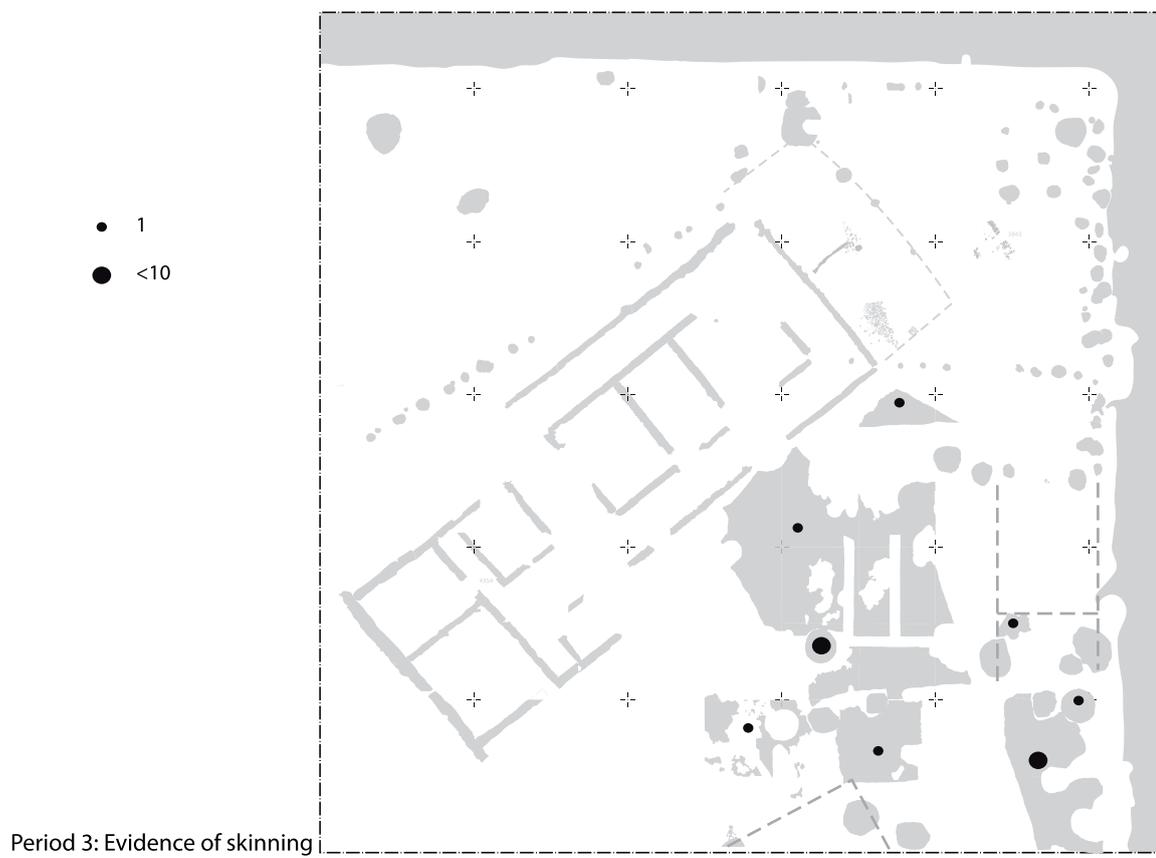
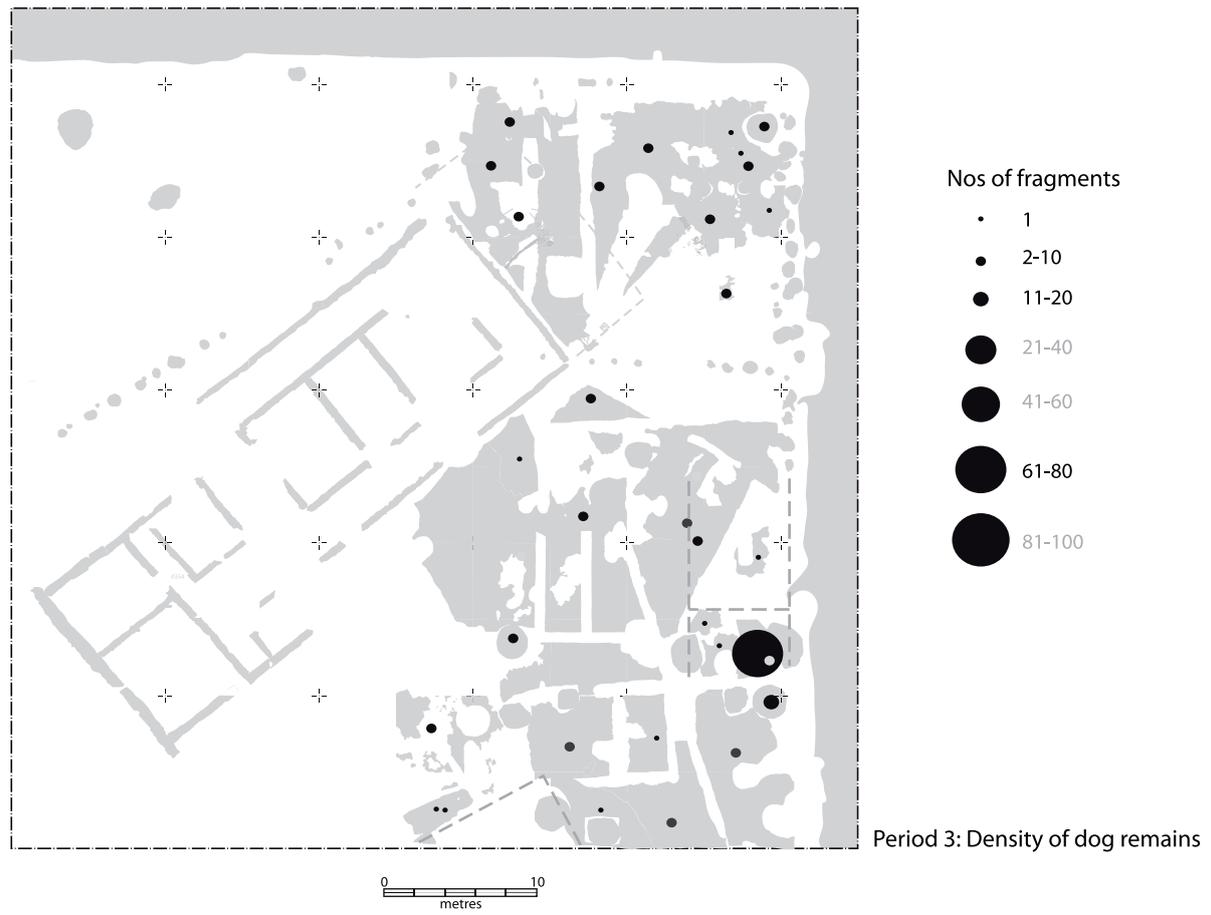


FIG. 126. Period 3: density of dog remains (upper) and evidence of skinning (lower).

South-east layers (Object 701)*Accumulation deposits (85 fragments)*

The majority of the fragments were recovered from context 5698. At least two individuals, with estimated shoulder heights of 37cm and 42cm, are present in these contexts, and all areas of the skeleton with the exception of tibiae are represented. One animal was less than 36 weeks, the other older than 40 weeks. Only one cut mark was visible, on a maxilla fragment (3225).

Building make-up

Only two fragments were recovered, from context 3435; a fifth metatarsal from an animal standing 34cm at the shoulder, and a pelvic fragment.

Dump deposits (10 fragments)

A minimum of two animals are represented in these deposits, one older than 20 weeks and one less than 28 weeks. In addition a foetal metatarsal was recovered (4270). Skinning marks are visible on two humeri (4308) and a mandible (4254).

Occupation deposits

Five fragments were recovered. A femur of an animal of less than 36 weeks exhibited a skinning mark (4469), as did a scapula from context 4277.

Silt (10 fragments)

One animal less than 32 weeks of age (4307), and one older than 40 weeks (4070) are represented in these deposits; a skinning mark is visible on a mandible (4307).

Small pits

Context 6284 contained two 2nd and two 3rd phalanges, and context 6286 a radius of an animal older than 24 weeks.

Floor

Context 3431 produced a single mandibular fragment.

MRTB 1/ERTB 1 [=ERTB 4] (Object 50037) (24 fragments)

Context 4151 yielded eight bones (mandibles, radius, ulnae and tibiae) which may well be from one individual older than 32 weeks. Further limb bone remains from Object 50037 were recovered from floor deposit 4170 (4 fragments), occupation deposit 5335 (2 fragments from an animal older than 40 weeks), layer 3732 (2 fragments indicating an animal over 32 weeks of age), and accumulation deposit 4811 (1 fragment). Mandibular fragments were present in layers 3847 and 3532, the latter context representing two individuals.

Object 50030

The four fragments from these contexts (4153 gravel spread, 4774 post-hole and 5275 occupation/demolition layer) are all of limb bones.

MB 1 (Object 50018)

The floor deposit context 4152 produced forelimb elements (humerus, radius and ulna) which are likely to be from one individual less than 40 weeks of age.

PERIOD 4 (FIG. 127)

South-east pits (Object 500017)*Well 1750 (8 fragments)*

Context 2767 produced the femur of an animal older than 24 weeks, the tibia of a dog older than 44 weeks which exhibits a very well-healed fracture of the distal shaft, and three articulating cervical vertebrae. A mandible and ulna were recovered from context 1750.

Pit 2434 (86 fragments)

A minimum of three dogs are represented in this pit, and in addition a neonate scapula (2776) and metacarpal (2774) were recovered. All areas of the skeleton are present. At least one animal is older than 40 weeks (2774) and two are less than 32 weeks (2776). One dog, over 44 weeks, has bowed tibiae (2605).

Pit 2601 (56 fragments)

In this pit context 2622 produced the partial skeleton of a dog whose fusion status indicates an age of between 24 and 36 weeks. Further discussion of this animal is given below (pp. 277–8).

The other dog remains from context 2622 which are not constituents of the partial skeleton comprise a femur, two radii from separate individuals, one of which was less than 32 weeks of age, and three articulating left metatarsals. A baculum, the only occurrence of this element in the assemblage, is also present but cannot be directly associated with the partial skeleton. Context 2623 contained a right maxillary fragment, and context 2762 produced two vertebrae, the left portion of a pelvis, and a rib fragment.

Pit 3102

The single fragment from this pit (3827) is a 4th metatarsal from an animal standing 36cm at the shoulder.

Pit 3406 (28 fragments)

Remains from a minimum of two animals plus a neonate radius were recovered primarily from context 4290. One dog was older than 40 weeks, another younger than 32 weeks. Skinning marks were visible on a humerus (3826) and tibia (3829).

Well 5735 (6 fragments)

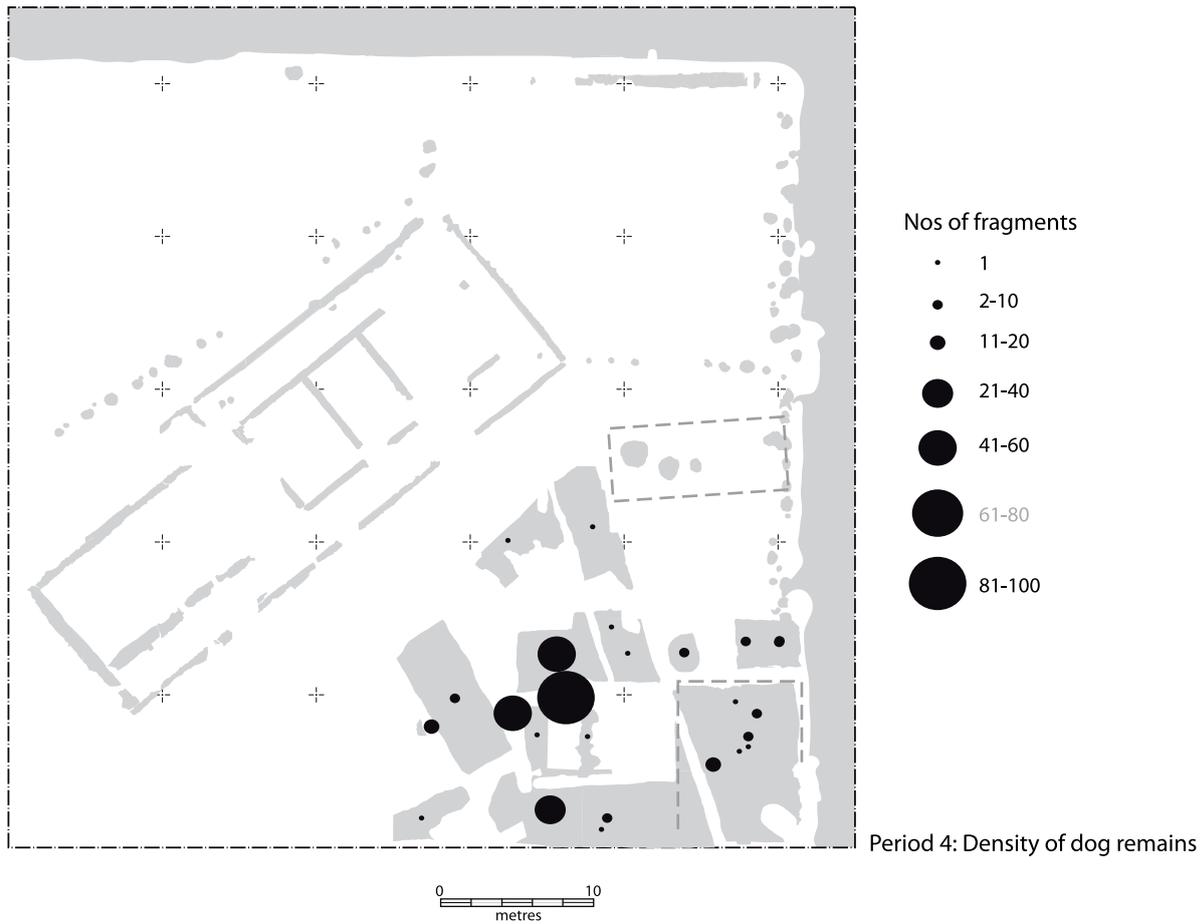
The femur of a dog younger than 32 weeks (5697), together with two metacarpals (6294 and 6430), a tibia (6430) and a scapula (6436) exhibiting a skinning mark were present.

South-east layers (Object 700)*Building make-up (94 fragments)*

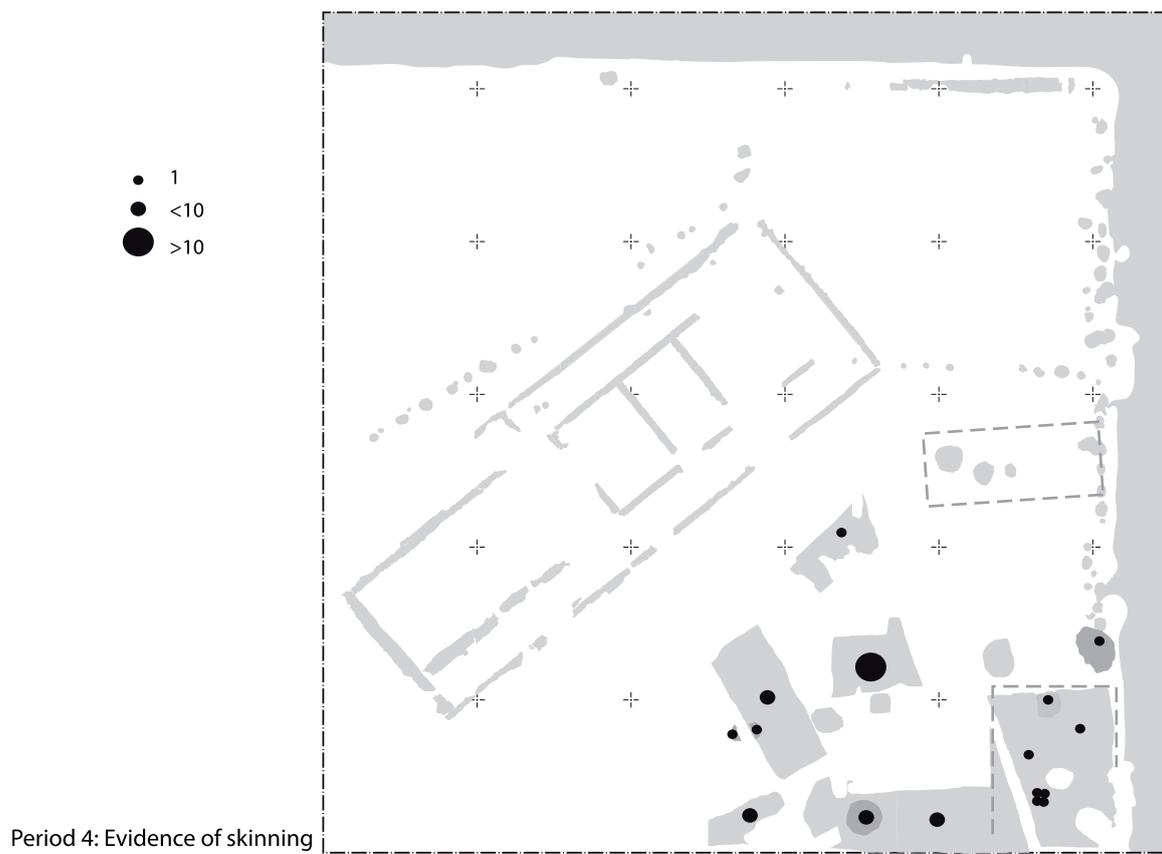
A minimum of four dogs are represented in these contexts. Two of these were older than 44 weeks (3468 and 3836) and two younger than 32 weeks (3468, 3498), and immature dentition in one mandible indicates the presence of a pup less than 10 weeks (3468). 24 fragments, including that of the pup, exhibited skinning marks. One dog had bowed tibiae (2916).

Dump

A single fragment of humerus was recovered from context 3467.



Period 4: Density of dog remains



Period 4: Evidence of skinning

FIG. 127. Period 4: density of dog remains (upper) and evidence of skinning (lower).

Levelling

Context 2467 produced a single maxilla with a skinning mark below the orbit.

Occupation

These contexts (3911 and 3849) produced a pair of mandibles and four fragments of scapula, radius, maxilla and mandible. One of the paired mandibles and the mandibular fragment exhibited skinning marks.

Post-holes

2650: four fragments were recovered — fibula, fibula fragment, ulna and tibia. The tibia exhibited skinning cuts.

2651: the femur of an animal older than 32 weeks, and a rib.

2658: two mandibles (one juvenile, the other neonate), humerus, 2nd metatarsal and 1st phalanx. From the metatarsal a shoulder height of 35cm is calculated, and the humerus exhibits skinning cuts.

2670: 13 fragments and small bones were recovered from this post-hole, including a neonate scapula. A 2nd metacarpal and 4th metatarsal both produce estimated shoulder heights of around 40cm.

MB 3 (Object 50046) (18 fragments)

The majority of the remains (15 fragments) are from the levelling deposit (3396) where at least two dogs are represented in limb bones and pelvis. Further contexts yielding single dog fragments are cut 3636 (sacrum) and occupation deposit 2471 (mandible).

AGE AND SEX

Fusion evidence (Sumner-Smith 1966) for Period 3 layers suggests only one animal of full skeletal maturity (Object 701 context 5698), supported by a single case of moderate mandibular tooth wear from the same context. The remaining dogs from the early layers appear to be between 20 and 36 weeks of age. The age profile for the Period 3 pits (Objects 500029 and 500017) indicates that all the animals were between 20 and 32 weeks. The presence of foetal or neonate animals is restricted solely to two metapodia from the dump context 4270.

In the Period 4 layers (Object 701) there is evidence for one dog of skeletal maturity (humerus from building make-up context 3468), the remainder being between 24 and 36 weeks. Period 4 building make-up also provided the single instance of age-related pathology — a pelvic fragment exhibiting minor periarticular exostosis (context 3498). Neonate/foetal material occurred only in post-holes 2658 (mandible) and 2670 (scapula). In the Period 4 pits mature remains were recovered from pit 3406 (humerus from context 4290) and well 5735 (tibia in context 6430). The remaining animals appear to be between 20 and 32 weeks of age. Neonate or foetal remains again were rare, occurring in pit 2434 (metacarpal context 2774, scapula context 2766), pit 3406 (radius context 4290), and pit 4825 (humerus context 4832).

Tooth wear in the cheekteeth cannot be used to age dogs directly as the degree of wear depends on diet and the proclivity to chew. However youthful animals can be identified by unworn dentition, and Appendix 7, Table 76 shows the level of wear observed in mandibular and maxillary teeth *in situ*. These observations concur with the results from the fusion data, where only one aged animal is visible in each period.

The only baculum recovered was from Period 4 pit 2601, context 2622. While negative evidence cannot be taken as conclusive, it would appear likely that the majority of dog remains of both periods are from females. This, together with the fusion data and the paucity of neonate/foetal material, may tentatively indicate that bitches were despatched as they achieved sexual maturity.

SIZE

Selected measurements of skull, mandible, axial and appendicular remains are shown in Appendix 7, Tables 77–86. Measurable limb bones, including the metapodia, have been used to estimate shoulder height using the factors of Harcourt (1974) and Clark (1996), and the results of these calculations are shown by period and deposit type in Table 87.

The size ranges within each period are similar (Period 3: 32–45cm, n=7; Period 4: 30–49cm, n=15), and are both firmly within the range for Romano-British dogs. By amalgamating the two periods it is possible to compare this assemblage with recorded Romano-British dogs of the mid-second to mid-third century A.D. (Harcourt 1974; Clark 1996; 2000), and this comparison is shown in FIG. 128. By this period the bifurcation of the Romano-British dog population into smaller and larger animals was becoming apparent, but this is not reflected in the Silchester assemblage which shows a higher degree of uniformity.

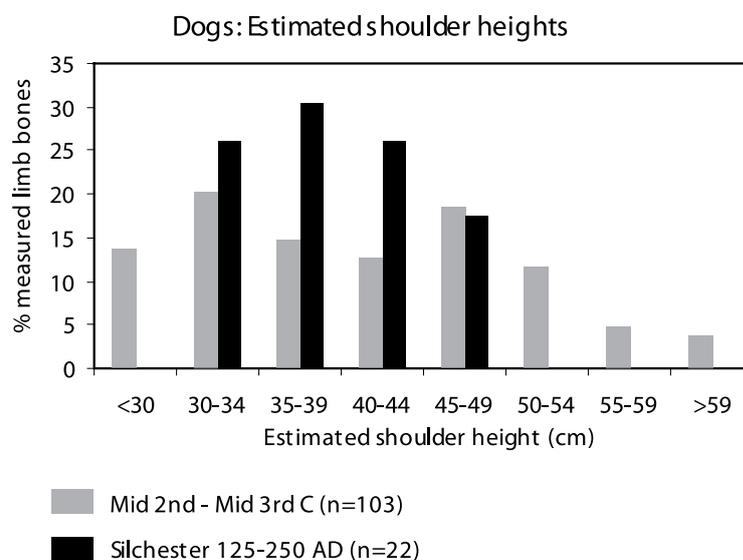


FIG. 128. Estimated shoulder heights of dogs from Silchester and elsewhere in Roman Britain, second to third centuries.

SKINNING (FIGS 126–127)

Cut marks were visible on remains from both Period 3 and Period 4, and these are described in Appendix 7, Tables 88–89 by context, element and location. The cuts are fine and precise, and all are consistent with skinning, rather than disarticulation. With the exception of a cut mark on the lateral face of a scapula from well 5735, they are confined to the limb bones, the metapodia, and the mandible.

However, there is a notable difference between the incidence of cut marks on these elements, both between periods and between deposit type and this is summarised in Appendix 7, Table 90. Skinning marks are most abundant in the Period 4 layers, and are predominantly found in the building make-up contexts.

PIT 2601 CONTEXT 2622

Photographic evidence suggests that the animal in this context was originally deposited as a complete carcass, carefully placed on the right side in a tightly curled-up position with the muzzle typically tucked against the tarsal joints. As the body has decomposed and compressed from above the pelvis has disarticulated and the left femur has been depressed into the skull.

The right forelimb has been recovered in the humerus, radius and ulna, and the left hindlimb in the femur, tibial fragment and the metatarsals. The axial elements comprise one cervical, three thoracic and five lumbar vertebrae together with the sacrum, complete pelvis and both scapulae. The skull is fragmented but largely complete, as are both mandibles.

The dog is aged between 24 and 36 weeks, and there is no wear on the teeth. The shoulder height, calculated from measurements of the radius and metatarsals, is estimated at around 48cm.

Sufficient measurements were available in the skull and mandibles to enable comparison with modern specimens, and there is a notable concordance with the dimensions of a modern crossbred Staffordshire terrier (Appendix 7, Table 91), the only significant divergence being that the pit 2601 animal has a slightly more robust development of the mandibular articulation.

DISCUSSION

Although there is a marked constraint in age and size within this group of dogs, and possibly of sex, the notable characteristic is the incidence and consistency of the skinning evidence in Period 4. Skinning of dogs in the Late Iron Age/early Romano-British period is occasionally reported, as at first-century Owslebury (Maltby 1987a), Brighton Hill South (Maltby 1987b), and Coombe Down and Chisenbury Warren (Powell *et al.* 2006), and from later Romano-British sites as at the second/third-century deposits at Rope Lake Hole (Coy 1987) and the later contexts at Chisenbury Warren (Powell *et al.* 2006). Definitive evidence of an actual dog skin was present in the third/fourth-century child's grave from Asthall (Booth *et al.* 1996). However, with the exception of the Asthall material, observations of skinning cuts are intermittent and are invariably accompanied by disarticulation evidence within the same assemblage, suggesting that some dogs were eaten and the skins were removed as a by-product or to facilitate cooking. This does not seem to be the case at Silchester in the early third century. Here, skins appear to be systematically removed from young adult or sub-adult animals and, by invoking negative evidence, those animals may have been predominantly female.