

1.1 Assessment of Cremated Human Bone

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Introduction

- 1.1.1 Cremated bone was retrieved by whole-earth recovery from three adjacent pits in trench 3695TT. The deposits (359605, 359607 and 359608) are all probably of Romano-British date. The deposits were whole-earth sampled to ensure the complete recovery of not only all cremated bone (human or otherwise) but also any associated artefacts. Partial sampling may not have recovered elements of the entire assemblage that may contribute to our understanding of the funerary process as a whole, particularly if spatial variations were present within the deposits.

Methodology

- 1.1.2 The bone from each deposit was weighed, and an assessment of cremation efficiency and bone fragmentation was made (McKinley 1994). The number of individuals per deposit and the age of those individuals were also assessed (*op cit.*) (Table 14).

Quantifications

Table 14: Summary of cremated bone

Feature	Context	Context type	Bone weight	Colour	Age
Pit 359604	359605	?Redeposited pyre debris	41.3g	White	Adult
Pit 359606	359607	?Redeposited pyre debris	97.8g	White	Adult
Pit 359609	359608	?Redeposited pyre debris	48.1g	White	Adult
		TOTAL	187.2g		

Provenance

- 1.1.3 The bone was in good condition, both compact and spongy bone being recovered, suggesting little bone is likely to have been lost as a result of adverse burial conditions. Some level of truncation may have occurred, the features ranging in depth from 0.15 - 0.26m, consequently it is possible that some bone may have been lost from the deposits.
- 1.1.4 The mixed nature of the deposits - fragments of cremated bone dispersed amongst charcoal and fragments of fired clay – and the small amounts of bone recovered, suggests they may not represent cremation burials, but rather redeposited pyre debris cleared from the pyre site(s) after the collection of bone for burial (McKinley 1998).

Conservation

- 1.1.5 There are no conservation issues that may affect further analysis.

Comparative material

- 1.1.6 A number of fieldwork events elsewhere on the CTRL have produced cremation-related features and deposits of a broad Romano-British date. Most notably, a considerable number of cremated burials and *in situ* cremations (*bustums*) were recorded at the Waterloo Connection site, Northfleet (ARC NBR98; URS 1999a), as well as examples at, for instance, Pilgrim's Way (ARC PIL98; URS 1999b) and North of Saltwood Tunnel (ARC SLT98; URS 1999c).

- 1.1.7 Similar types of deposit have been recovered from Romano-British cemetery sites at Holborough (Jessup 1959) and East London (Barber and Bowsher 2000, McKinley *in press*). It is likely that these types of deposit are more common elsewhere, but have been mis-interpreted as unurned burials.

Potential for further work

- 1.1.8 The potential for further analysis is limited. Although, given the small quantities of bone recovered, it is difficult to be conclusive, there is no reason to suppose that the three deposits do not all relate to separate cremation episodes. The bone all represent adult remains and further analysis is unlikely to expand on demographic detail. There was no evidence of pathological lesions.
- 1.1.9 The bone is universally white in colour, evidence of efficient cremation (Holden *et al.* 1995a, 1995b). The quantities of bone recovered are very small, ranging from 41.3g to 98.8g, the latter representing a maximum of 10% of the expected weight of bone from an adult cremation (McKinley 1993). The maximum fragment size is *c.* 25mm, most fragments being <10mm. Full analysis further pertaining to pyre technology and ritual will only serve to expand on the skeletal elements represented within the deposit and the possible significance of the distribution, though no obvious bias in skeletal areas was noted in assessment.
- 1.1.10 The main potential of this assemblage lays in the observation that the presence of redeposited pyre debris is indicative of the probable presence of both burials and pyre site(s) in the immediate vicinity. Assessment of published data from comparable sites in the area may illustrate if similar deposits existed in other Romano-British cemeteries in the region.
- 1.1.11 In this capacity, the cremated remains offer the potential to contribute to our understanding of the funerary process as a whole for the Romano-British period in the region, as little attention to these deposits, other than as ‘burials’ *per se*, has been given in the past. They therefore offer the potential to contribute to the landscape zone priority concerning the ritual and ceremonial use of the landscape.

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