

1.1 Assessment of Human Bone

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Introduction

Disarticulated bones and fragments of unburnt human bone were recovered by hand from five Iron Age contexts.

Methodology

All the bone was scanned to assess demographic data, potential for indices recovery and presence of pathological lesions. Assessments were based on standard methodologies (Brothwell 1972, Bass 1986, Buikstra & Uberlaker 1994).

Quantification

Each of the contexts contained elements of both human and animal bone. The identifiable animal remains comprise cattle and deer; the human remains represent parts of two adult females, the recovered skeletal elements of which are summarised in **Table 16** below.

Table 16: Human Bone quantification

Context	Feature	Sub-group	Period	Preservation	Age	Comments
2442	Pit 2441	5019	E/MIA	Medium	Adult (female?)	Three fragments of parietal? skull vault - age uncertain (20-40+?), though not from 2030
SK2033	Grave 2037		E/MIA	Medium	Adult female	Skull (inc. mandible, occipital vault and malar); axial skeleton (fragments from all areas of spine, sternum, ribs and innominate); upper limbs (fragments of both clavicles, scapulae and forearms, one humerus, hand bones); lower limbs (fragments from right side including foot bones) - same individual as 2032?, age 20-30
2032	Grave 2037		E/MIA	Medium	Adult female	Few fragments from all areas (same individual as 2033?) - age 20-30
SK2030	Grave 2031		M/LIA	Medium	Adult female	Mostly skull, two fragments sacrum and one foot phalanx - age c. 40+
2029	Grave 2031		M/LIA	Medium	Adult female	Fragments of skull and lower limb bones - age uncertain (20-40+?)

SK = Skeleton

Skeleton 2033 represents a very small, gracile individual aged *c.* 20-30 years, fragments from the same individual probably being represented by the bone recovered from context 2032. Matching between diaphyseal and epiphyseal fragments from skeleton 2033 suggests that at least some of the remains were articulated at the time of deposition.

Skeleton 2030 represents the remains of an older adult, aged *c.* 40 years. Some fragments of upper limb from 2030 may be from the younger adult female 2033; bone fragments from context 2029 may originate from either individual. Two of the parietal vault fragments from skeleton 2030 appear to show an unhealed wound from a 'pick-like' implement.

The fragments of skull recovered from Early/ Middle Iron Age pit **2441** are not part of skeleton 2030, but cannot be excluded from possibly being part of skeleton 2033 due to so little skull being recovered from the latter. If so, given the relative dates assigned to these features, this would imply that skeleton 2033 were previously buried within or near, pit **2441** before being moved to grave-pit **2037**.

Provenance

All the bone is in relatively good condition, with slight root/insect erosion of the cortical long bone from skeleton 2033, but heavily fragmented; almost all the breaks, including the 'pick-like' wound to skeleton 2030 apparently sustained in antiquity.

The fragmentary condition of the earliest burial (skeleton 2033) suggests it was either disturbed in antiquity or originally deposited as disarticulated remains. In view of the position of the secondary grave-pit **2031** cutting through the earlier feature (and the subsequent disturbance of both features by medieval pit **2036**), it is not implausible that skeleton 2033 has been disturbed. However, the heavy fragmentation of the rest of the bone, and the absence of most of the skull, suggests there was also some other form of disturbance or bone removal, or that the body was perhaps not complete when initially buried.

Skeleton 2030 largely comprised skull, and probably was already dry at the time of deposition. It was located within in a confined space in the north-west corner of pit **2031**, and almost certainly represents re-interred disarticulated remains.

Conservation

There are no conflicts between further analysis and short-term storage. Under the terms of Schedule 11 of the CTRL Act 1996, all human remains are to be reburied.

Comparative material

The deposition of disarticulated human remains in Iron Age pits is not uncommon (Whimster 1981); in this instance, the discrete location of the bone suggests deliberate placement rather than incidental inclusion in the fill. 'Special' deposits within Iron Age pits may include human bone and similarly, remains have also been recovered from midden deposits. The physical transition from cadaver to skeleton also appears to have carried a transition in the cultural identity of the remains and the way in which they were viewed. The nature of this transition, presumably by way of some form of excarnation, is not clear, but the lack of apparent gnawing by scavengers suggests exposure was not the method used, exhumation being the most likely alternative.

Potential

A full archival record of the human remains is required. Some reconstruction of skull fragments is recommended to assess the nature and extent of observed pathological lesions. The full potential of further analysis will lie not necessarily in the extraction of further demographic data or the recovery of pathological information but in consideration of the 'ritual' nature of the deposits and expanding our understanding of Iron Age mortuary activities. The nature of the deposits may be best understood when considered in relation to the other contexts around them.

DNA analysis may assist in identifying individual remains, and therefore post-depositional movement between features, as well as potentially indicating related individuals. However, it is by no means certain that suitable samples may be obtained from the remains recovered at Little Stock Farm. Although diagnostic ceramics were obtained from the graves, radiocarbon dating of the skeletal remains will place these features more confidently within a chronological framework. Again though, it is by no means certain that sufficient material (such as collagen) survives to enable such samples to be taken.

Bibliography

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