

Fig. 1: site location plan

The excavation of a Quaker burial ground, 84 London Road, Kingston upon Thames

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Introduction

For ten weeks in the autumn of 1996, Archaeology South-East, the commercial branch of the University College London Field Archaeology Unit, undertook a rescue excavation of the Quaker burial ground located in London Road, Kingston upon Thames. The unoccupied space was due for residential development (Fig. 1).

The excavation, funded by Rushmon Ltd, provided a rare opportunity to investigate an early

Quaker community both through their burial practices and their physical remains¹. The excavation aims were primarily an investigation of the topographical development of the burial ground, Quaker burial rites and undertaking practices. These were achieved through detailed on site recording and the subsequent osteological analysis of the human remains. It was also possible to carry out detailed historical research alongside the on-site work as the Quakers were meticulous record keep-

1. L. Bashford & T. Pollard 1998 'In the burying Place' – the excavation of a Quaker burial ground' in M. Cox (ed) *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England 1700-1850*, CBA Research Report 113, York; 154-166.

ers and documentary sources relating to the burial ground itself and some of the individuals within it were available for study.

Historical Background

The burial ground was in use from 1664 to 1814. The Quakers leased, and subsequently bought the garden and orchard which existed on the site in 1663, with the first burial taking place in 1664. The last recorded burial on the land took place in 1814, when another plot was adopted for the same purpose and the London Road burial ground fell out of use².

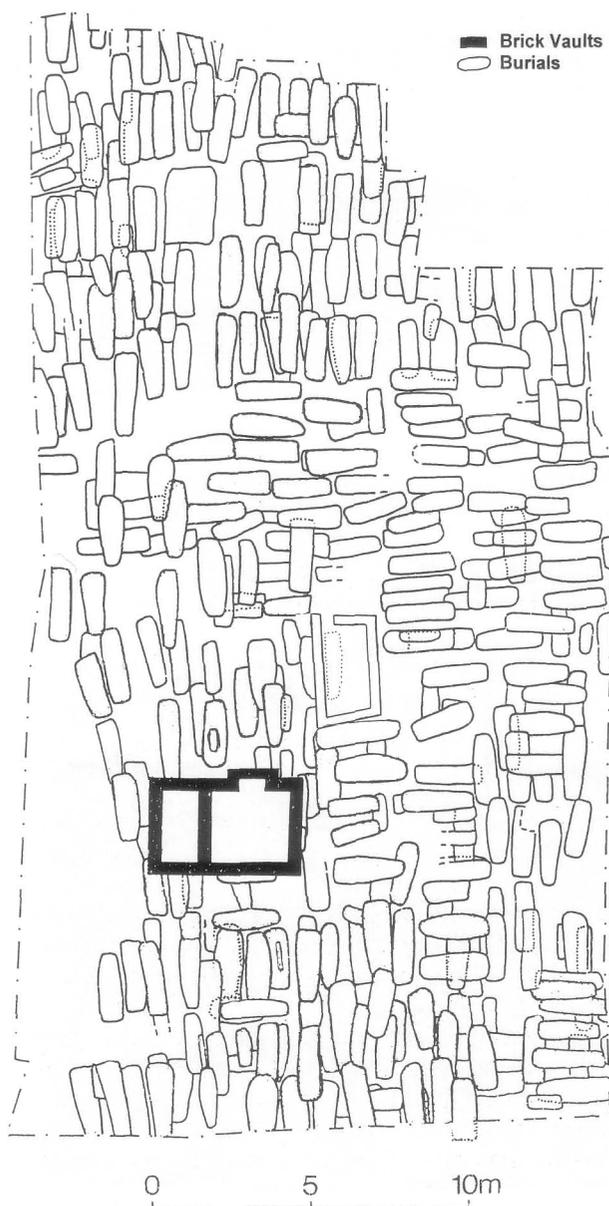


Fig. 2: plan of site showing orientation of burials

During the life of the burial ground the area available for burials was enlarged four times and a total of 497 burials are recorded. However, it is clear that the perimeters of the burial ground extend to the north and west beyond the limits of the development area.

Archaeological background

In 1993 an archaeological evaluation was carried out on the site by the Museum of London Archaeology Service³. The two small trenches excavated revealed at least 26 burials, complex stratigraphy and suggested that preservation on site was good.

Results of the 1996 excavations

The non-conformist nature of the burials was immediately apparent with the majority (55%) of burials orientated north to south, only 10% east to west in the traditional Christian manner, and the remaining 35% either south to north or west to east (Fig. 2).

The degree of truncation on site varied enormously but attempts were clearly made during the early years of the cemetery to avoid disturbing existing burials. This can be seen at the southern end of the site where west to east burials have been carefully located between the earlier north to south rows. However, during the cemetery's later years disturbance and re-use of earlier graves seems to have been more common, with charnel pits containing neatly arranged bones frequently discovered beneath secondary burials.

There was little evidence for specialised areas within the burial ground with children, for example, sporadically located throughout. Five double burials were located and three of these involved the burial of an infant on top of adult female coffins. Bodies were mostly positioned in a supine position with arms by the side but individuals were occasionally buried with arms or legs crossed.

It was possible in some cases to determine the outline of a coffin from the decayed wood stain, but coffins were more frequently represented by the handles alone. The coffins ranged from plain rectangular wooden boxes to those constructed with glass viewing windows (Fig. 3) or those retaining evidence of decorative upholstery studs and fragments of cloth (Fig. 4). Stud work on some coffins was used to display biographical data such as the name or initials of the deceased, age and date of death (Figs. 5 & 6). Decayed fragments of coffin

2. *Ibid.*, 155.

3. P. Miller 1993 84 *London Road Kingston: an archaeological evaluation* unpublished, Museum of London Archaeology Service.



Fig. 3: survival of glass from a coffin's viewing window (scale, 20cm).

linings and winding sheets were present in several of the lead coffins and imprints of mattresses and pillows were also noted.

Evidence for burial dress was scant but a decayed leather cap and leather front-fastening ties were

recovered from separate lead coffins, and a pair of cufflinks from another individual. As would be expected in a burial ground of this type of age, there was no evidence that personal items were interred with the bodies.

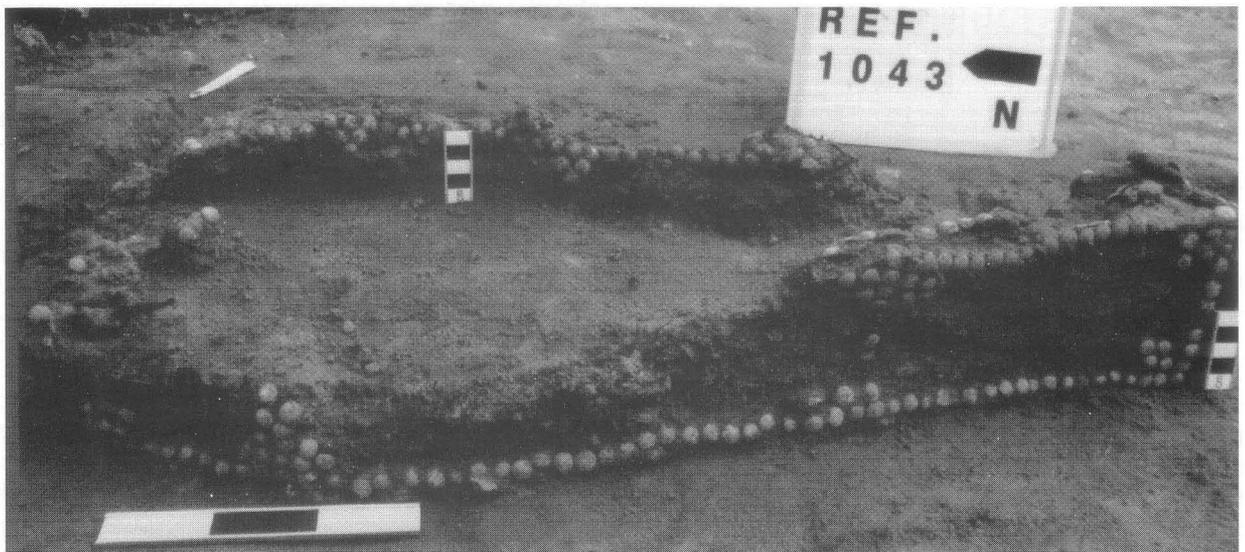


Fig. 4: copper stud decoration on an infant coffin (scales; 1 x 15cm, 2 x 5cm)



Fig. 5: studwork displaying the biographical details of Francis H[olding] who died in 1696 (scales; 1m and 50cm)

The most ostentatious burials were contained within a brick-built burial vault located towards the southern end of the site (Fig. 7). The vault, constructed in 1744 by Thomas Barnard, contained nine individuals (three generations) of his family who were prominent within the Quaker community in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Thomas'

4. *Op cit* fn 1, 162.

brother John was MP for London, Lord Major in 1737 and held the title 'Father of the City'.

Some of these coffins displayed evidence for triple shell construction and all but one had inscribed name plates. Seven additional lead coffins were located around the perimeter of the vault and one contained Jane Gambles, sister of Thomas Barnard. Several burials generated particular interest. One of these, Anna Barnard, was the last interment in the burial vault, her lead coffin placed centrally on the top tier. An examination of the partially crushed coffin not only revealed that 'old' breaks in the lead were present alongside the recent disturbance at the head, vault entrance end, but also that her body was no longer inside. All that remained were the remnants of a blonde wig. This suggests that she had been inside the coffin but perhaps removed by 'body-snatchers', active during the 18th century⁴.

Another interesting discovery was made during the exhumation of remains from a lead coffin. Within the coffin were placed four whole walnuts, complete with shells. The first was located in the individual's mouth, the second and third between the knees and feet, the fourth having fallen through the partially decayed coffin base. The fact that they may represent the deliberate interment of symbolic items is significant, but their precise symbolism is uncertain. In folk medicine walnuts are associated with mental illness and madness and perhaps the individual interred was suffering from some form of mental illness⁵.

Skeletal analysis

The osteological analysis was designed to establish, amongst other things, the demographic structure of the population and to investigate and interpret pathological manifestations. It was hoped it would also be possible to compare the results of biological assessment to the historical picture of the group provided by documentary sources.

The demographic profile was established from age and sex data. It was possible to construct an historical demographic profile from the records of 146 individuals and this was then compared to the osteological results (Fig. 8). The only significant difference was found in the youngest category encompassing infants aged between birth and five years. Approximately 8% of individuals fell into this category as a result of the osteological analysis, compared to approximately 27% historically. This under-representation of young children in archaeological populations is not uncommon and is fre-

5. *Op cit* fn 1, 162.

quently explained by poor preservation of the smaller infant bones and the resulting incompleteness of the excavated sample⁶.

The site also provided the opportunity to compare 16 individuals of known age with their osteologically-established ages. The number of individuals in this study is too small to be statistically significant, but it was noted that standard osteological techniques tend to over-age younger individuals and under-age the older adults, a phenomenon which has been noted elsewhere⁷.

All pathological manifestations were recorded during the analysis and as would be expected for a population of this size dental, joint, infective and congenital diseases were all well represented, as were metabolic disorders and trauma. One of the most significant skeletons recovered was individual 1098, an adult male suffering from venereal syphilis. He demonstrates one of the most advanced

6. H. Start & L. Kirk 1998 'The bodies of Friends' – The osteological analysis of a Quaker burial ground' in M. Cox (ed) *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England 1700-1850*, CBA Research Report 113, York; 167-177

7. T. Molleson & M. Cox 1993 *The Spitalfields Project Volume 2 – The Anthropology, The Middling Sort*, CBA Research Report, 86, York



Fig. 6: biographical details and decorative studwork forming a heart shape beneath. (scales; 40cm and 20cm)

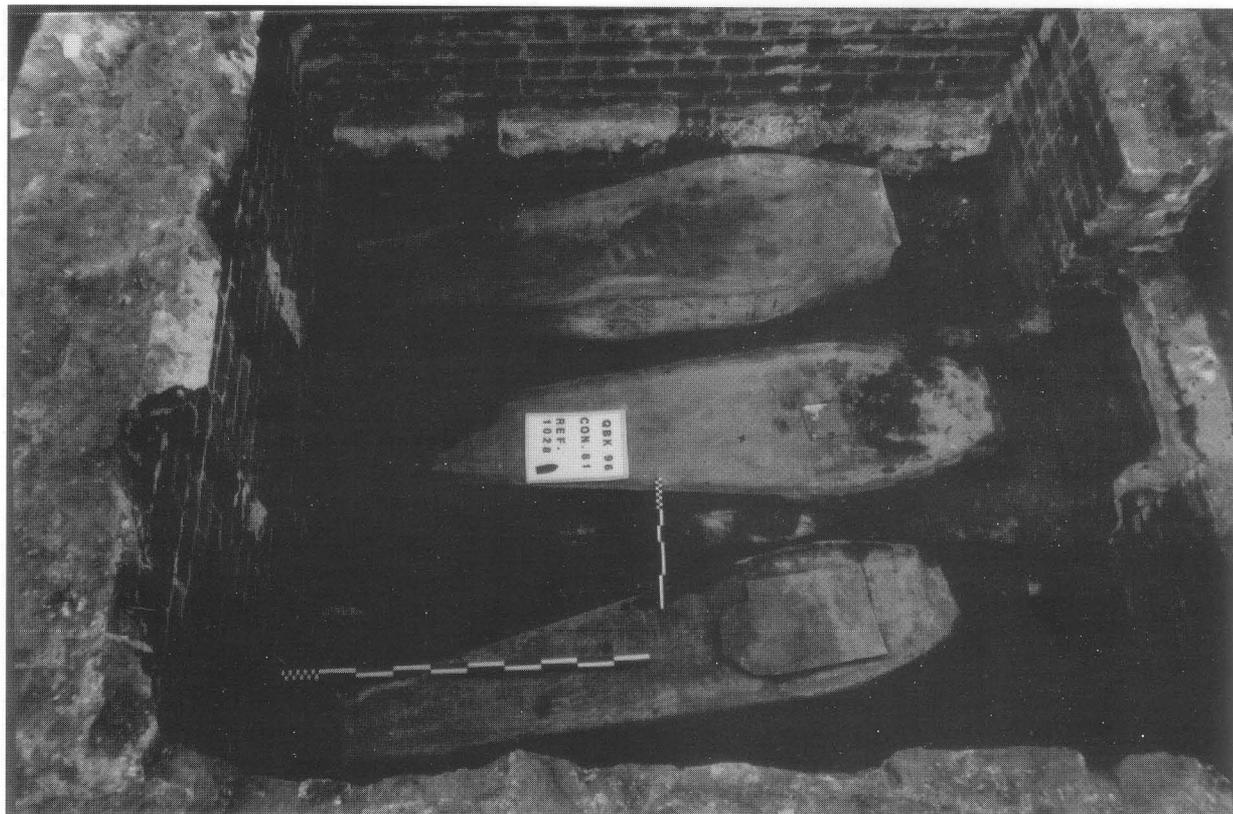


Fig. 7: lowest tier of Barnard vault with entrance steps to north (scales; 1m and 40cm)

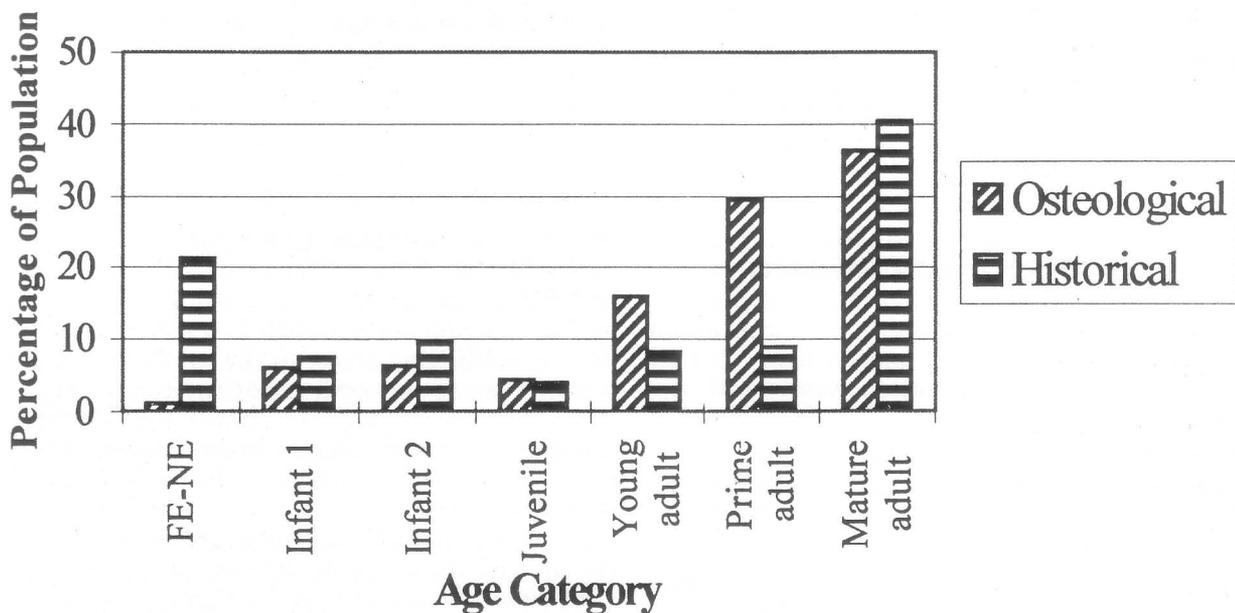


Fig. 8: Comparison of osteological and historical populations.

levels of skeletal change caused by venereal syphilis yet recovered from the archaeological record⁸.

In general the pathological evidence suggests that neither dietary deficiency nor excess were prevalent in the community and that poor living standards were not a common experience. It also suggests that individuals with severe illness and visible deformities were treated, and buried, as equals. This osteological evidence for a generally healthy Quaker population mirrors the historical picture of a thriving, middle-class community⁹.

Discussion

It was possible to fulfil the research aims through the archaeology alone, but the wealth of documentary sources available for study has made it possible to obtain a much fuller picture of this Quaker community.

Perhaps of most interest are the apparent deviations from Quaker ideals represented by the archaeological findings. The Quaker community found the idea of truncating and disturbing earlier graves abhorrent and codes of conduct surrounding burial practice reflect this feeling¹⁰. Despite early attempts to avoid this happening trun-

cation of burials was a frequent occurrence. Permission for the construction of the Barnard vault was only granted "apprehending that it will not incommode any graves already made", a fact that appears from the archaeological evidence to have been disregarded by the time of construction¹¹.

The Rules of Discipline also imply that ostentatious displays were frowned upon, but such displays are evident at Kingston. The Barnard vault is an obvious example, but the variation in coffin types present would suggest that they reflected the status of the individual within¹².

When the excavations took place at London Road, Kingston upon Thames, they constituted the first major excavation of a Quaker burial ground. These excavations provided the opportunity to investigate a population of both archaeological and osteological importance, whilst gaining a real insight into Quaker burial practices and funeral rites during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The full report, L. Bashford & L. Kirk 'Excavation of a Quaker Burial Ground, London Road, Kingston upon Thames', is nearing completion and will be submitted to *Surrey Archaeological Collections* for publication.

8. *Op cit* fn 6, 175.

9. *Op cit* fn 6, 176.

10. *Op cit* fn 1, 159-161.

11. *Op cit* fn 1, 159-161.

12. *Op cit* fn 1, 159-161.