

Archaeological Excavation

2 Roseberry Crescent, Norton

Stockton-on-Tees

Preliminary report



TA10/12

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Peter Rowe

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*Tees Archaeology, Sir William Gray House, Clarence Road, Hartlepool, TS24 8BT
Tel: 01429 523455 Fax: 01429 523477 email: tees.archaeology@hartlepool.gov.uk*

Contents

Summary

1. Introduction	1
2. Location and Geology	2
3. Historical and Archaeological Background	2
4. Aims and Objectives	3
5. Methodology	3-4
6. Results	4-7
7. Finds	7-8
8. Conclusions and Recommendations	8-9
9. Bibliography and Sources	9

Figures

- 1 The location of the site and HER information
- 2 The location of the trenches and in situ skeletons

Plates

- 1 Skeleton 1 (Trench 2)
- 2 Skeleton 3 (Trench 4)

Appendix 1 License for the Removal of Human Remains.

Summary

This report describes the methodology and results of an archaeological excavation undertaken by Tees Archaeology at 2 Roseberry Crescent, Norton, following the discovery of human remains by builders. The site is centred on National Grid Reference NZ 44869 22300. The fieldwork was undertaken in April 2007.

The site consists of the front and side garden of a domestic semi-detached house constructed sometime between May 1948 and May 1950. Human remains were discovered by builders whilst excavating foundations for a new conservatory, porch and inspection chamber on 10 April 2007.

The archaeological excavation comprised the partial investigation of five skeletons found *in situ* along with the recovery of charnel from spoil heaps and other disturbed deposits. The amount of bone recovered suggests a well-established cemetery rather than a discrete collection of burials.

The site is currently undated but would appear to fit the Christian burial tradition being oriented east to west and with no grave goods. It is recommended that radio-carbon dating is carried out along with specialist assessment of the human remains.

1. Introduction

An archaeological excavation took place at 2 Roseberry Crescent, Norton (Figure 1-2) following the discovery of human remains by builders digging the foundations for a new conservatory and porch. The works were undertaken by Tees Archaeology between 11 April and 12 April 2007 on behalf of the householder. The fieldwork was carried out by Peter Rowe and Rachel Grahame.

This document describes the results of the excavation and discusses the significance of the remains.

2. Location and Geology

The site comprises the front and side garden to 2 Roseberry Crescent, Norton at NZ 44869 22300 (Figures 1-2). The house itself is absent from aerial photographs dated 16 May 1948 (RAF Sortie 541/23 F14"//16,600, Frame No. 3105) but present on Ordnance Survey 1:2500 sheet NZ4422 revised May 1950. It lies within an estate of similar, mature, semi-detached houses begun during the inter-war period (circa 1925-38) with building resuming following the end of hostilities and continuing into the later 1950s.

The area lies at approximately 20m above mean sea level giving it a distinct advantage in altitude over the adjacent Billingham Beck valley which lies to the immediate east. Geologically the area comprises well drained glacial sands and gravels overlain with a fertile loam.

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

A pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery (HER 1065) was discovered to the south of Mill Lane in 1982 (Sherlock & Welch 1992), 250m to the north of the current site. This consisted of 120 furnished burials covering the greater part of the 6th century (based on typology of grave goods). A Christian cemetery (HER 3412) of the later Anglo-Saxon period was discovered at Bishopsmill School in 1994 (Event 72) and noted again (Event 73) at a neighbouring property at 30 Bradbury Road in 1995 (Anderson 1995). These isolated finds led to the excavation (Event 61) of part of the cemetery in 2003 prior to the extension of the school (Johnson 2005). This cemetery consisted of three phases of burial which were unfurnished other than some of the final phase which were buried in wooden chests. Both of these cemeteries appeared to be self contained with the pagan site respecting the boundaries of an earlier field system (HER 5109) and perhaps focussing strings of burials on a former prehistoric burial mound (HER 5108) (Sherlock & Welch 1992 p 12-17). The full extent of the Christian cemetery is not properly established. However there is a growing body of negative evidence resulting from watching briefs at neighbouring domestic properties on either side of Bradbury Road to suggest that the remains do not extend to its south, or to the east of no. 30 (HER Events 150, 152, 153, 201, 252, 347, 412, 540, 626 & 683). It is however quite possible that outliers exist to either of these cemeteries.

A further cemetery (HER 3478) worthy of note was discovered at Freshfields, Norton (Daniels, 1996). This lies approximately 700m to the south-west of 2 Roseberry

Crescent. It consisted of three unfurnished burials radio-carbon dated to Cal AD 330 to 545 (Beta-139724), significantly earlier than any of previously mentioned cemeteries.

As well as the above cemeteries there have been a number of stray finds of human remains within the vicinity. These include 6 Mill Lane (HER 653), 38 The Green (HER 0740), and 1-3 Fernie Road (HER 0737) where three stone lined graves were uncovered, each of which was said to contain a bronze dagger or sword. These are all historical reports usually as the result of urbanisation in the mid 20th century.

It appears that human remains were noted in the Roseberry Crescent/Roseberry Road area during house construction. In 1937 the Rev. F.W. Lister described the discovery of several burials discovered during the laying of a sewer to the rear of no's 38-44 Roseberry Road. He wrote that *'without attempting anything systematic, we picked out of it (the sewer) several weapons, shaped like pikes, all so rusted that it was impossible to prevent them crumbling; a horn spoon and a Charles I half crown...Later two individual burials were exposed; just below the surface of the soil in the present Roseberry Road. One was a very tall man. I would say they were much earlier in date, but there were no relics with them'* (Tees Archaeology HER 0741).

The discovery of further burials in the area was reported in the local press in 1955. The burials were disturbed by machine and described by the operator, Mr. John Starling as follows *'They were nearly all in the same area. There must have been three or four skeletons'* (Evening Gazette, 23 August 1955). The exact location of the find is not clear; the newspaper account states the construction site overlooked Billingham Bottoms.

It is not clear how or if any of these historical discoveries relate to the archaeologically recovered material at 2 Roseberry Crescent.

4. Aims and Objectives

The aims of the excavation were to recover as much as possible of the disturbed material and to ensure that further excavations were monitored in order that *in situ* human remains could be properly excavated.

The results of the excavation will form part of a permanent archive of the site. The archive will be held by Tees Archaeology under the site code NRC07.

5. Methodology

On arrival at the site the majority of ground disturbance had already taken place. This consisted of a foundation trench forming three sides of a rectangle for the conservatory on the south-east side of the property (Trench 1; see Figure 2). The trench was 0.8m wide and measured 4.6m by 3.5m. It had been finished for building purposes at a depth of 0.9m. The majority of the human remains were said to have come from this trench and had been bagged by Cleveland Police in approximately one and a half large refuse sacks. The police 'surgeon' estimated that approximately 4 individuals were present.

Trench 2 had been excavated to the front of the house for a porch extension to the main entrance (see Figure 2). The trench had not been excavated to its intended depth at this stage. It consisted of three sides of a rectangle and was 0.8m wide and 2.25m by 1.6m in dimension.

Trench 3 was excavated by the builders under archaeological supervision. This projected from the south-west corner of the property and was 0.8m wide and 1.5m in length. This was a short trench to support a pillar for a projecting canopy above the garage linked to the porch.

The final trench (Trench 4) was excavated by the builders under archaeological supervision. This was for an inspection chamber on the south-east side of the property to the side of the new conservatory.

A license was obtained from the Department of Constitutional Affairs under section 25 of the Burial Act, 1857 for the exhumation of any remaining burials. This was issued on 11 April 2007 (Appendix 1).

The excavations were carried out under difficult conditions with minimal staff. The builders could not be controlled and continued to remove human remains in breach of the license, particularly after hours when there was no archaeological presence. There was considerable interest from the media and the general public. As a result site records were limited to photography using a Pentax MZM SLR with 35mm black and white film and colour transparencies supplemented with digital images taken on a compact Fuji Finepix S3500 at 4 megapixels. Schematic sections were drawn in the daybook at 1:10 with schematic plans with annotated measurements. Trench locations were measured in against the plan of the existing house.

6. Results

Trench 1

The sections and base of Trench 1 were cleaned by hand. The basic stratigraphy consisted of 0.3m of dark brown humic topsoil (100). This overlay 0.6m of dark orange/brown silty sand (101). It was evident that considerable disturbance had taken place during the construction of the property with disturbed human remains visible in section beneath the house foundation (102) and even noted mixed in with the concrete. A group of human bones (Skeleton 5) was noted in section on the inside of the trench at its south-west corner (see Figure 2). These appeared to be *in situ* with the trench truncating the body above the thigh. These were left in place but were removed by a third party contrary to the license. This was investigated and the remains were subsequently recovered. As a result none of the human remains from this trench were archaeologically excavated but there is evidence for both disturbed and intact burials.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was overlain with a concrete slab for the driveway which was 0.05m in thickness (200). This overlay mid orange/brown friable silty sand (201). This was a mixed deposit with pockets of clay, topsoil and fragments of brick and modern pottery. It was considered to be made up following construction of the property and was 0.55m in thickness. Beneath this layer was a thin lens (0.1m) of dark brown, firm, humic, sandy silt (202) interpreted as the base of earlier topsoil truncated by the house building. This overlay dark orange/brown silty sand (203) which contained charnel fragments alongside brick and modern pottery. This may represent a pre-house construction cultivation layer or horticultural horizon which had caused some disturbance to the human remains. It was 0.25m in thickness and overlay a dark orange firm clay/silt (204) of 0.05m thickness which

may have been a variation in the mid-brown/yellow loose natural sand (205) noted at the base of the trench.

A disturbed supine burial (Skeleton 1) was noted in the middle of the long arm of this trench within 203 (Figure 2; Plate 1). The body was oriented east to west with the head at the west end. It consisted of the skull and spine, slightly twisted to the right side, along with the arms, with the remainder of the body extending into the section and not excavated. The body was previously disturbed with the jaw fragmented and the ribs largely missing. The left arm was folded at the elbow across the chest/waist. A grave cut was not observed.



Plate 1: Skeleton 1 (Trench 2).

Trench 3

Trench 3 had a similar section to Trench 2. It was overlain with the same concrete slab (300) above a disturbed layer (301; same as 201). This layer was only 0.2m thick in this trench and overlay a yellow builder's sand (302) 0.2m in depth. The truncated topsoil (303; same as 202) was present but survived to a greater thickness of 0.2m. This overlay 304 (same as 203) above natural (307; same as 204). The western end of this trench contained a grave cut (306). This was linear, aligned east to west and cut into the natural (307; same as 204) by 0.15m. The grave fill (305) was comprised of the same material

as 304. The human remains were oriented and positioned as Skeleton 1 and consisted of the left side of the skeleton which had been previously disturbed. Parts of the spine, ribs, left arm, pelvis and upper legs were retrieved. More bone was visible in the section to the south but this was not removed.



Plate 2: Skeleton 3 (Trench 4) with charnel deposit above (top right of trench).

Trench 4

The stratigraphy of Trench 4 was less disturbed than that observed in Trenches 2 & 3. The concrete pad (400) overlay 0.3m of dark brown firm humic silt (401) interpreted as topsoil. This overlay dark orange/brown, friable, silty sand which contained some charnel and Skeletons 3 & 4. Skeleton 3 was not disturbed; however no grave cut was visible. The trench passed across the chest, arms (folded across the chest), pelvis and upper legs. The burial rite was as observed for Skeletons 1 and 2. Only the feet of Skeleton 4 were present within the trench with the legs extending into the section.

Phase 1

The Cemetery

The in situ burials represent the first discrete phase of activity at the site. These were all aligned east to west and with grave fills largely indistinguishable from the surrounding matrix.

Phase 2

Agricultural/Horticultural disturbance

At least one of the burials (Skeleton 1) was disturbed by agricultural or horticultural activity. This may have been long-standing agriculture or more recent activity, possibly connected to the 'Dig for Victory' campaign of World War II.

Phase 3

House Construction c. 1949

The current property was constructed shortly after the end of World War II. This caused major disturbance to the cemetery and is probably responsible for much of the chanel in the upper deposits.

Phase 4

Conservatory and porch construction 2007

It is not clear how much of the chanel, particularly from Trench 1, was caused by the excavating of the current foundations. Skeleton 5 was certainly truncated in this episode.

7. Finds

The finds from the site largely comprise human remains. Sea shells were noted in association with two of the in situ burials.

<i>Trench/ Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>
Trench 1	210 fragments of chanel including a partially complete skull recovered by Cleveland Police. Undoubtedly includes remainder of Skeleton 5.	Human remains	?
Trench 1; Skeleton 5	Feet and lower legs of in situ skeleton removed unlawfully and subsequently recovered.	Human remains	?
Trench 2; Context 202	363 fragments of chanel removed under archaeological supervision.	Human remains	?

Trench/ Context	Description	Type	Date
Trench 2; Context 203	160 fragments of charnel including a partially complete skull removed under archaeological supervision.	Human remains	?
Trench 2; Skeleton 1	Skull and torso of in situ burial. Removed by archaeological excavation.	Human remains	?
Trench 3; Skeleton 2	Left side of torso and upper legs of in situ burial. Removed by archaeological excavation.	Human remains	?
Trench 4; Context 402	8 fragments of charnel removed under archaeological supervision.	Human remains	?
Trench 4; Skeleton 3	Torso and part pelvis of in situ burial. Removed by archaeological excavation.	Human remains	?
Trench 4; Skeleton 4	Feet only of in situ burial. Removed by archaeological excavation.	Human remains	?
Trench 4, Context 402	Fragments of oyster shell associated with Skeleton 3.	Human remains	?
Trench 4, Context 402	Cockle shell associated with Skeleton 4.	Human remains	?
Unknown	130 fragments of human bone removed by builders.	Human remains	?

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Although the site was badly disturbed (not least by the current episode of construction) and the archaeological recording was constrained by several factors, this is a significant site which adds a new dimension to the archaeological record for the village of Norton-on-Tees.

The site is currently undated. It is tempting to draw direct comparison to the later Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bishopsmill School with its unfurnished, supine burials in east-west orientations (Johnson 2005). It is however quite possible that the remains could relate to practically any other period from the prehistoric onwards as was demonstrated unexpectedly at the Freshfields site (Daniels 1996). At the other end of the scale there is anecdotal evidence for post-medieval material being recovered with human remains in this area in 1937 (Tees Archaeology HER 741).

Should the remains pre-date the Anglo-Saxon period then they would be intrinsically interesting in their own right. An Anglo-Saxon date would enhance the significance of the area at this period with a concentration of cemeteries not usually noted outside of monastic settlements. A medieval date would be unusual as at this period there was a

well established churchyard at St. Mary's Church to west. A medieval cemetery outside of the core of the settlement might suggest a war or plague cemetery. Likewise a post medieval cemetery would be unusual and perhaps tied to disease or conflict.

Recommendations

The date of the cemetery is not known. It is recommended that a sample is taken for radio-carbon dating. The most appropriate specimen would be the undisturbed Skeleton 3 from Trench 4.

It is recommended that an assessment is made of the human remains by an osteo-archaeologist. This should make particular reference to the previous examinations of human remains from the area.

Following scientific dating and specialist assessment it is recommended that the report is made available in a local or regional archaeological publication.

9. Bibliography and Sources

Anderson, S 1995 *The Skeletal Remains from Bradbury Road, Norton* Sussex County Council

Annis, R. 1994 *A Group of Human Burials from Bishopsmill School, Norton, Cleveland*. May 1994 Cleveland County Archaeology Section

Daniels, D. 1996 *Human Burials at 'Freshfields' Norton, Stockton-on-Tees* Tees Archaeology file note dated 24 May 1996

Johnson, P. 2005 *Cemetery Excavation at Bishopsmill School, Norton: Post-excavation assessment and analysis* Tees Archaeology TA05/02

Sherlock, S. & Welch, M. 1992 *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Norton, Cleveland*. CBA Research Report 82. London: Council for British Archaeology.

Other Sources

Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Tees Archaeology

Ordnance Survey National Grid Edition map of 1952, 1:2500 = 25.344 inches to 1 mile Sheet NZ 4422 (revised April – June 1950)

Aerial Photograph R.A.F. Sortie 541/26 16 May 1948 F14"/16,600 Frame 3105

Appendix 1



LICENCE FOR THE REMOVAL OF HUMAN REMAINS

In virtue of the power vested in me by section 25 of the Burial Act, 1857 (20 & 21 Vic., cap.81), I hereby grant a licence for the removal of the remains of **persons unknown** from the place in which they are now interred at **2 Roseberry Crescent, Norton, Stockton on Tees, TS20 1LB.**

2. It is a condition of this licence that the following precautions shall be observed:
 - (a) The removal shall be effected with due care and attention to decency;
 - (b) The ground in which the remains are interred shall be screened from the public gaze while the work of removal is in progress;
 - (c) The removal shall be to the satisfaction of the environmental health officer for the district in which the remains are at present interred and in accordance with any additional conditions they may impose;
 - (d) The remains shall, if of sufficient interest, be examined by an expert appointed by Tees Archaeology;
 - (e) The remains shall be retained by Tees Archaeology, Sir William Gray House, Clarence Road, Hartlepool TS24 8BT, or reinterred in a burial ground in which interments may legally take place, and in any intervening period they shall be kept safely, privately and decently.
3. This license merely exempts those from the penalties, which would be incurred if the removal took place without a license. It does not in any way alter civil rights. It does not confer the right to bury the remains in any place where such right does not already exist.
4. This licence expires on **11 July 2007.**

Falconer J Norton
✓

One of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State

Department of Constitutional Affairs

Licence: **Archaeological**
Licence Number: **07-0048**

File Number: **OPR/072/18**

Date: **11 April 2007**