

AN ANGLO-SAXON QUADRUPLE WEAPON BURIAL AT TIDWORTH: A BATTLE-SITE BURIAL ON SALISBURY PLAIN?

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ABSTRACT

A mid-6th century grave on a spur just east of Tidworth was found to contain the bodies of four male adults, all buried at the same time and accompanied by weapons. The nature, location and date of the grave make it seem possible that it was connected with the resurgence of military activity in this area after AD 552.

DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION

In 1992, soldiers digging a trench just east of, and above, South Tidworth came across human bones. The military authorities notified one of the authors (RE) who began a rescue excavation which uncovered the remains of three skeletons. Because of time constraints, the excavation of what had by then been recognized as an Anglo-Saxon multiple grave had to be stopped, and the excavated area was backfilled. The excavation was concluded in the summer of the same year by the other author (HH) with archaeology students from the University of Reading.

The site (SU 24254755) is located on Salisbury Plain, virtually on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border; originally in Hampshire, it is now just on the Wiltshire side. It is on a small spur of Warren Hill, overlooking the eastern slope of the valley of the river Bourne which runs south towards the Avon (Fig. 1). The location (170 m above sea level) affords distant views to the southwest, northwest and north.

After the grave had been excavated, two 0.50 m wide trial trenches were dug, one running 2 m south from the section, the other 2 m east from the edge of the section (approx. 3 m east from skeleton 4), to test for adjacent graves. The length of

the trial trenches was limited by the trackway to the east of the grave, and the gradual slope to the south. Trenches in other directions were impossible because the ground drops off sharply to the west and north of the grave.

The original field documentation, finds and human bones are currently kept in the Salisbury Plain Project archive (Department of Archaeology, University of Reading).

THE GRAVE

The grave pit showed a subrectangular outline, with a maximum size of 2.58 × 1.95 m, and a depth of 0.80–0.85 below modern surface. The grave floor was more or less level, completing the overall impression of a carefully cut grave. At the time of the excavation, there appeared to be a small tumulus over the grave, but this may have been an artefact of the situation on a spur, right above steep slopes on two sides, a gentle slope on the third, and on the fourth a trackway which had cut a depression there.

The grave contained the well-preserved skeletons of four individuals side by side, one of which was severely disturbed by the military trench (Fig. 2). Three of the bodies had been deposited on their backs or slightly turned to the right, with heads turned right, i.e. facing east and pointing south. Only skeleton 1 was lying slightly flexed on the right side, turned towards the other three bodies and facing in the same direction. The inhumation rite, the style of deposition and the inclusion of grave-goods (cf. below) all conform to standard early Anglo-Saxon burial practice in Wessex. The absence of any evidence for later re-opening of the grave or intersections of the

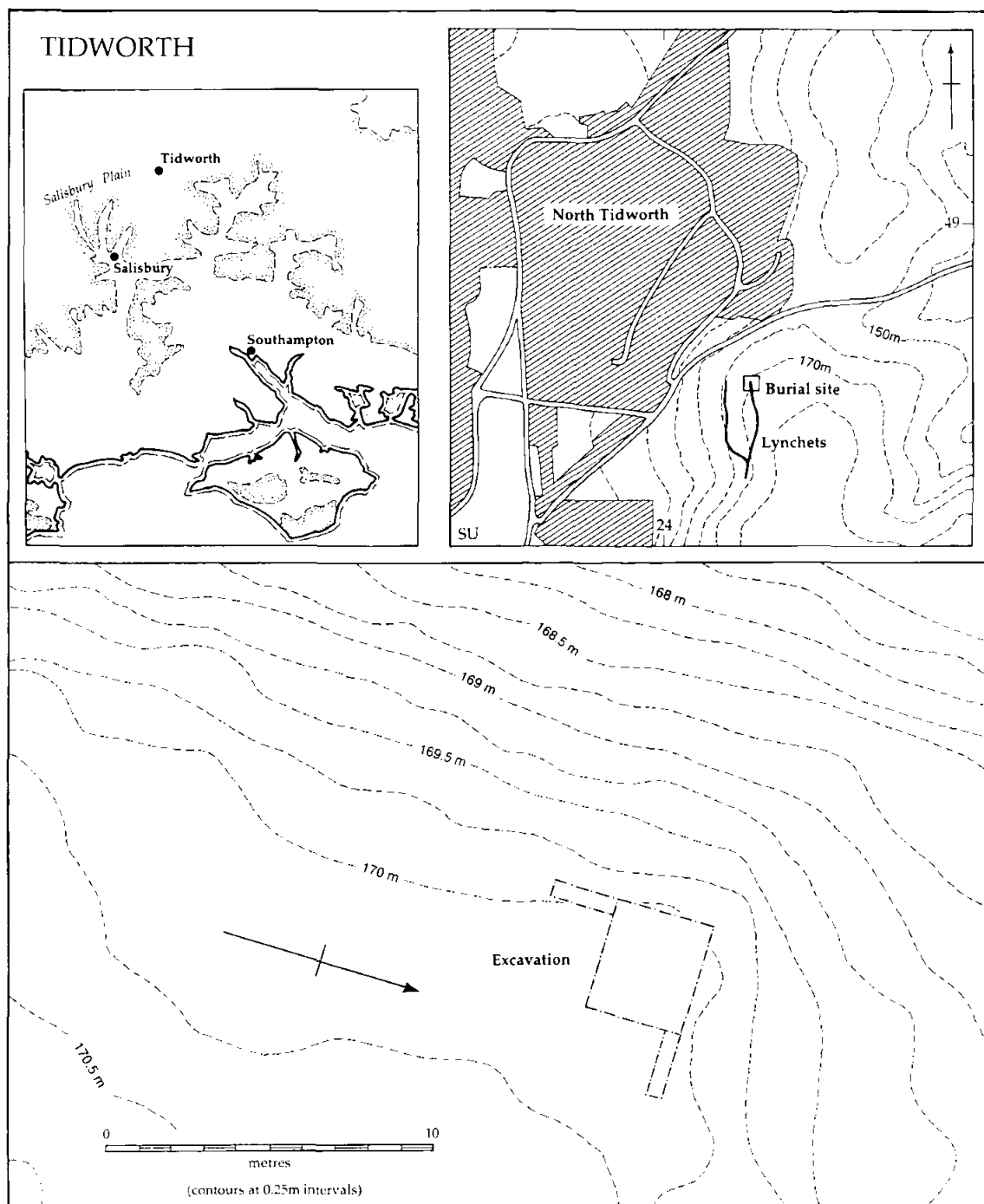


Fig. 1 The location of the quadruple weapon burial

TIDWORTH - Excavation plan

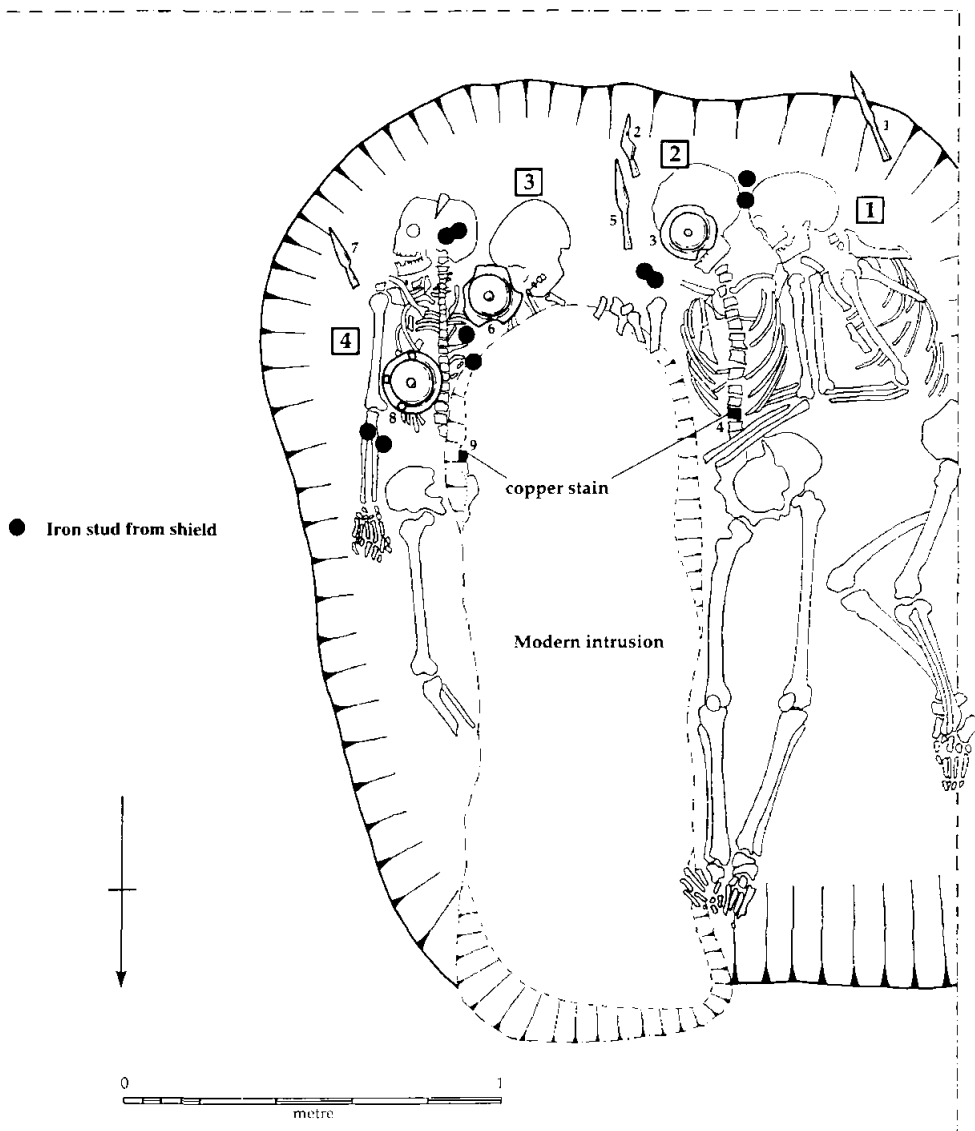


Fig. 2 The grave plan (scale 1:20)

burials suggests that all four bodies had been deposited at the same time. This is confirmed by the even spacing of bodies in the grave, with no hint of any of them having been forced later into an existing grave. Also, the board studs of the shield (inventory no. 6) with skeleton 3 were lying on top of the skull of skeleton 4, demonstrating that this shield had been deposited after skeleton 4 had been put into the grave; and the board of the shield (no. 3) covering the skull of skeleton 2 must have been overlapping the shoulder, and most likely part of the head, of skeleton 1 when it was deposited. From this evidence, it is quite certain that all four bodies were first laid out on the grave floor, and only then the shields (and probably the spears) were added.

The bodies were those of adult males, from younger to older adult (cf. the skeletal report below). None of them showed any unusual features. The stature of three of them is close enough to the Anglo-Saxon male average (173 cm, or 5'8") to be unremarkable; the skeleton (no. 3) which had been disturbed by the military trench was too fragmentary for a calculation of stature. The skeletal study produced no clear evidence of the cause of death of the four men which led to their contemporaneous burial here; only one skeleton (4) shows slight evidence of trauma (a blade cut) which may have caused the death of this individual.

THE FINDS

The weapons and belt fittings found in the grave are the usual male grave-goods of this period. The only remarkable artefact found, an antler comb (inventory no. 14), may have been deposited with skeleton 3. It was destroyed by the military trench and was identified (by JMcK) from a fragment among the human bones from the backfill of that trench. Apart from this, the grave produced four spears, three shields, one knife and one decorated belt. The positioning of the weapons clearly suggests that there was one shield for each of the bodies 2, 3 and 4. The deposition of the shield over the trunk of body, as in the case of skeleton 4, is quite typical of Wessex, while the deposition to cover the head (skeletons 2 and 3) is less

frequent in this region (Dickinson and Härke 1992, 65–66). Given the presence of four spearheads, it appears justified to assign one spear to each of the skeletons although the deposition of two spears (nos. 2 and 5) between bodies 2 and 3 is slightly ambiguous. The deposition of the other two spears leaves no room for doubt as to which bodies they accompanied.

All artefact types are typical of the region; there are no unusual typological variations or constructional elements of any artefact in this grave. The inferred shield board sizes and grip constructions fall into the known range of early Anglo-Saxon shields (Dickinson and Härke 1992). The decoration of the shield board by opposed pairs of iron studs on the front is quite frequent in Wessex, although it is noteworthy that all three shields in this grave have this feature. The spearheads are standard types, and the iron spear ferrule from the military trench (no. 10) is typical in form, and even in frequency (one in four), of Wessex spears. It may have belonged to any one of the spears 2, 5 or 7, but most likely to 5 judging from position and spearhead type: corrugated spear blades of this type are associated twice as often with ferrules as is type H1 represented by spears 2 and 7 (cf. Härke 1992, 138). However, the presence of only one knife and one belt buckle with four male inhumations is a bit surprising as this is well below average frequency. Perhaps the copper stains (nos. 4 and 9) on the midriffs of skeletons 2 and 4 are the remains of further belt fittings. The 'shoe-shaped rivets' (no. 13) are decorative belt studs which are typical of southern England in this period (cf. Devenish und Champion 1977, 40–41).

The grave can be reasonably closely dated by the associated artefact types. Three of the four spearheads date to the later 5th to 6th centuries (nos. 2 and 7, type H1) and later 5th to mid-6th centuries (no. 5, type L or ?K1), respectively; the fourth spearhead (type H2, no. 1) is not closely datable (Swanton 1974; id. 1974). Two of the shield-bosses (nos. 6 and 8) belong to the Continental-style 'Merovingian' type of Dickinson's group 3 (Dickinson and Härke 1992). In Wessex, this boss is unlikely to be earlier than some time in the first half of 6th century (perhaps from the second quarter), and it continued into the early 7th century (Härke 1992). The third boss (no. 3) belongs to

the much rarer group 1.2, dating to the later 5th and earlier 6th centuries, continuing in Wessex probably a bit beyond the middle of the 6th century (*ibid.*). The knife (no. 11) has a 'Bowie' tip, but it is not clear if this is an original feature; even if it is, this can hardly be used to assign a late date to this knife (as the corresponding type D has in the Rhineland; Böhner 1958; for Anglo-Saxon knife types and sizes, cf. Evison 1987 and Härke 1989). The belt fittings from this grave, a belt loop of broad oval shape and two shoe-shaped rivets, are, generally speaking, 6th century types (Härke 1992; cf. now Marzinzik 2000).

Overall, the artefact assemblage in this grave is likely to belong to the middle of the 6th century. The 'Merovingian' shield-boss precludes a date before the second quarter of the 6th century, while the corrugated spearhead rules out a date after the third quarter of this century.

GRAVE INVENTORY

Note: Numbers in round brackets are the numbers shown in the grave plan (Fig. 2); numbers in square brackets are the original small-finds numbers given in the field drawings.

Skeleton 1 [SF 18]

Mature adult male (30–45 years). Skeleton on right side, arms bent forward, legs flexed; head to SSW. Associated finds:

- (1) [SF 13] Spearhead, iron, type Swanton H2 (Fig. 3); length 262 mm; resting on grave edge above head.

Skeleton 2 [SF 19]

Mature adult male (25–30 years). Skeleton extended on back, head turned to right, left forearm across waist, legs straight; head to S. Associated finds:

- (2) [SF 22] Spearhead, iron, type Swanton H1, blade bent (Fig. 4); length 185 mm; resting against head end of grave, above and in front of skull.
- (3) Shield remains:
 - a. [SF 16] Shield-boss, iron, with rod apex (integral), type Dickinson group 1.2 (Fig. 4); diam.

146 mm, extant height 72 mm; one complete rivet, with free shank length of 7.2 mm; on skull.

b. Shield grip, iron, short flat with expanded terminals, type Ia1 (Fig. 4); extant length 113 mm; traces of leather wrapping preserved on outside (width of strip 11.6 mm); two wood grain directions on inside of grip (from wooden handle and board); under boss.

c. [SF 28 and 29] Four iron studs, arranged in two pairs on either side of the boss (Fig. 4); max. diam. 19, 21 and 22 mm; one stud with washer, free shank length 7.6 mm, wood remains over entire length, with grain at right angles to shank; position of NE. pair suggests minimum diameter of board of 0.34 m (SW. pair probably dislodged from original position on decomposition of board).

d. [SF 26] Wood remains, 50 mm SE. of boss (from shield board?).

- (4) [SF 14] Copper-alloy stain; on lumbar vertebrae.

Skeleton 3 [SF 20]

Older adult male (45 years +). Position of skeleton unknown (disturbed by military trench), head turned to right; direction of head approximately to S. Associated finds:

- (5) [SF 27] Spearhead, iron, type Swanton L or ?K1 (Fig. 5); length 240 mm; above left shoulder, between skulls of skeletons 2 and 3.

- (6) Shield remains:

a. [SF 17] Shield-boss, iron, with integral apex, type Dickinson group 3 (Fig. 5); extant diam. 164 mm, height 81 mm; at least one copper-alloy rivet head on boss flange; one complete rivet, with free shank length of c. 6 mm, and wood grain over entire length of rivet, at right angles to shank; on right shoulder, in front of skull.

b. Shield grip, iron, short strap with hardly expanded terminals, type Ia1 (Fig. 5); extant length 128 mm; possible traces of leather wrapping preserved on outside (width of strip 7.8 mm); wood remains of board on inside of terminals, at right angles to grip (indicating a width of 78 mm for central hole in board); under boss.

c. [SF 46 and 47] Two iron studs, arranged in a pair on one side of the boss (opposite side disturbed by military trench) (Fig. 5); max. diam. 21 mm; free length of shanks 6.7 and 7.3 mm respectively; both with wood remains over entire length, with grain at right angles to shank; position suggests minimum diameter of board of 0.42 m; on top of skull of skeleton 4.

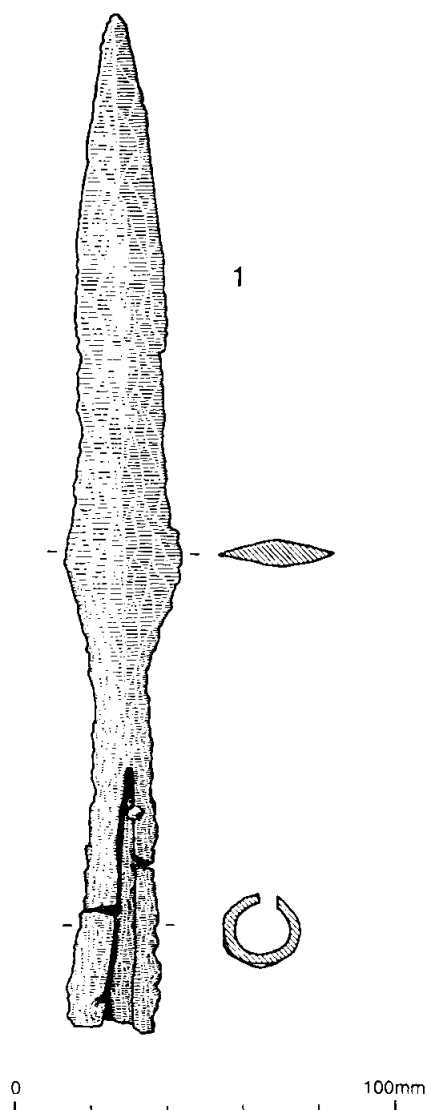


Fig. 3 Finds from the Tidworth grave (scale 1:2)

Skeleton 4 [SF 21]

Young adult male (18–25 years). Skeleton extended on back, head turned to right, right arm straight (left arm disturbed by military trench), thumb of right hand diagonally under fingers, right leg slightly flexed, left leg missing (disturbed), legs

possibly crossed at ankles; head to S. Associated finds:

- (7) [SF 45] Spearhead, iron, type Swanton H1 (Fig. 6); length 185 mm; outside right shoulder, tip against edge of grave, suggesting shaft diagonal across body.
- (8) Shield remains:
 - a. [SF 41] Shield-boss, iron, with integral apex, type Dickinson group 3 (Fig. 6); diam. 175 mm, height 82 mm; three complete rivets, with free shank lengths of 6.2 mm, 6.4 mm and 6.5 mm, respectively; all three with wood grain over entire length of rivet, at right angles to shank; wood remains and ?leather on underside of flange, with two wood grain directions at slight, but noticeable angle to one another (probably from two adjoining planks of the shield board); wood remains on top of cone (from spear shaft?); on right rib cage.
 - b. Shield grip, iron, short flat with expanded terminals, type Ia1 (Fig. 6); length 134 mm; traces of leather wrapping preserved on outside (width of strip 11.6 mm); two wood grain directions on inside of grip (from wooden handle and board); under boss, more or less central.
 - c. [SF 15, 42, 43, 44] Four iron studs, arranged in two pairs on either side of the boss (Fig. 6); max. diam. 37 mm; one stud with free shank length of 8.7 mm, ?leather on underside of head; position of E. pair suggests minimum diameter of board of 0.43 m, position of boss in relation to edge of grave suggests maximum diam. of board of 0.50 m.
- (9) [SF 3] Copper-alloy stains; on sacrum and lumbar vertebrae.

Military trench

- (10) [SF 1] Ferrule, iron, conical pointed type (Fig. 7); length 54 mm, ext. diam. 14.5 mm (may have belonged to any spear except that of skeleton 1).
- (11) [SF 2] Knife, iron, type Böhner ?D/Evison 6, with slightly upturned tip, size group 2 (Fig. 7); length 135 mm, blade length 106 mm; leather traces on blade; from skeleton 3 or 4.
- (12) [SF 14] Buckle, iron loop with copper-alloy plate (Fig. 7); extant length 65 mm; X-ray suggests broad oval loop and narrow plate; from skeleton 3 or 4.
- (13) [SF 4] Two shoe-shaped rivets (prob. belt fittings), copper-alloy (Fig. 7); length 23 and 21 mm, respectively; from skeleton 3 or 4.

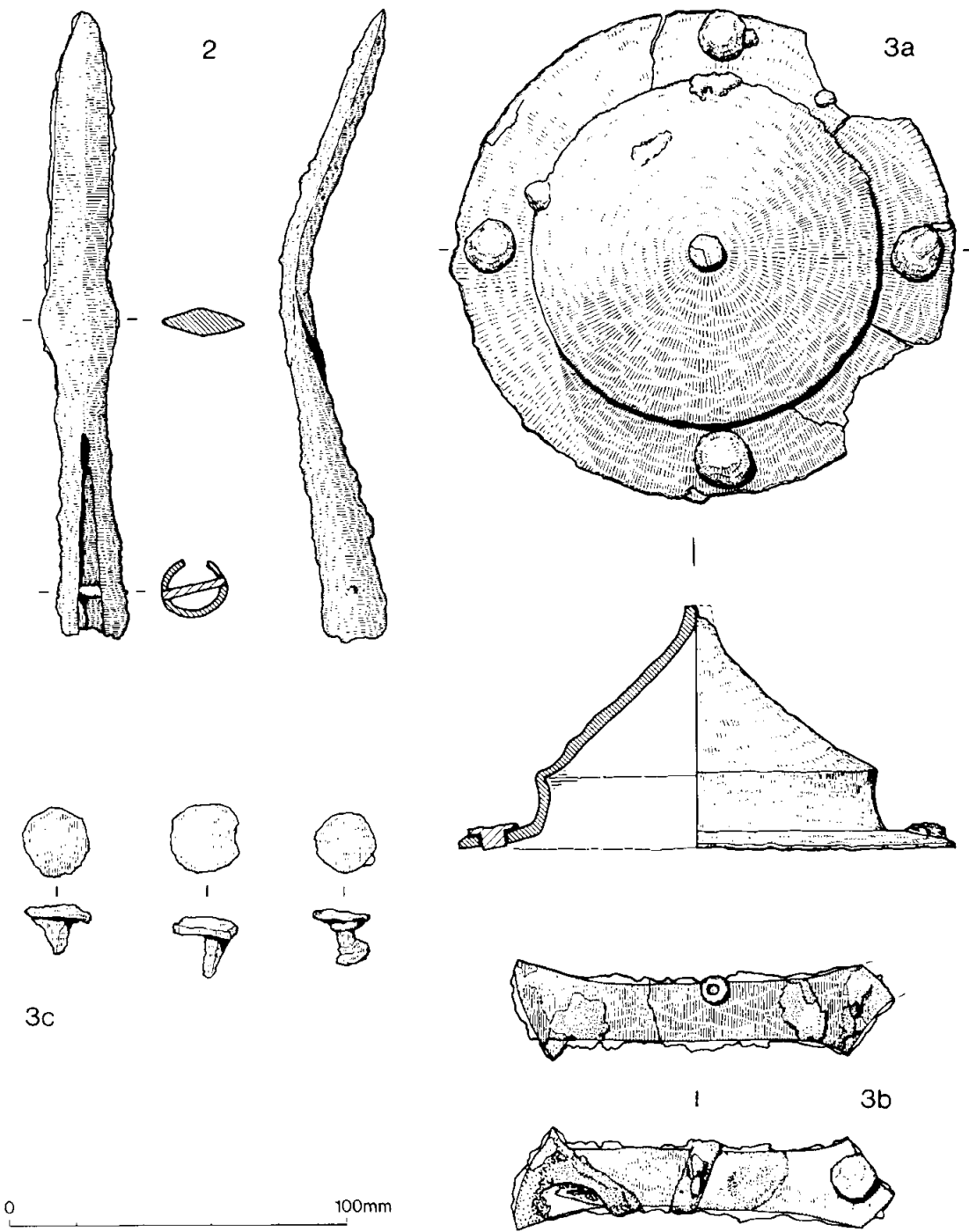


Fig. 4 Finds from the Tidworth grave (scale 1:2)

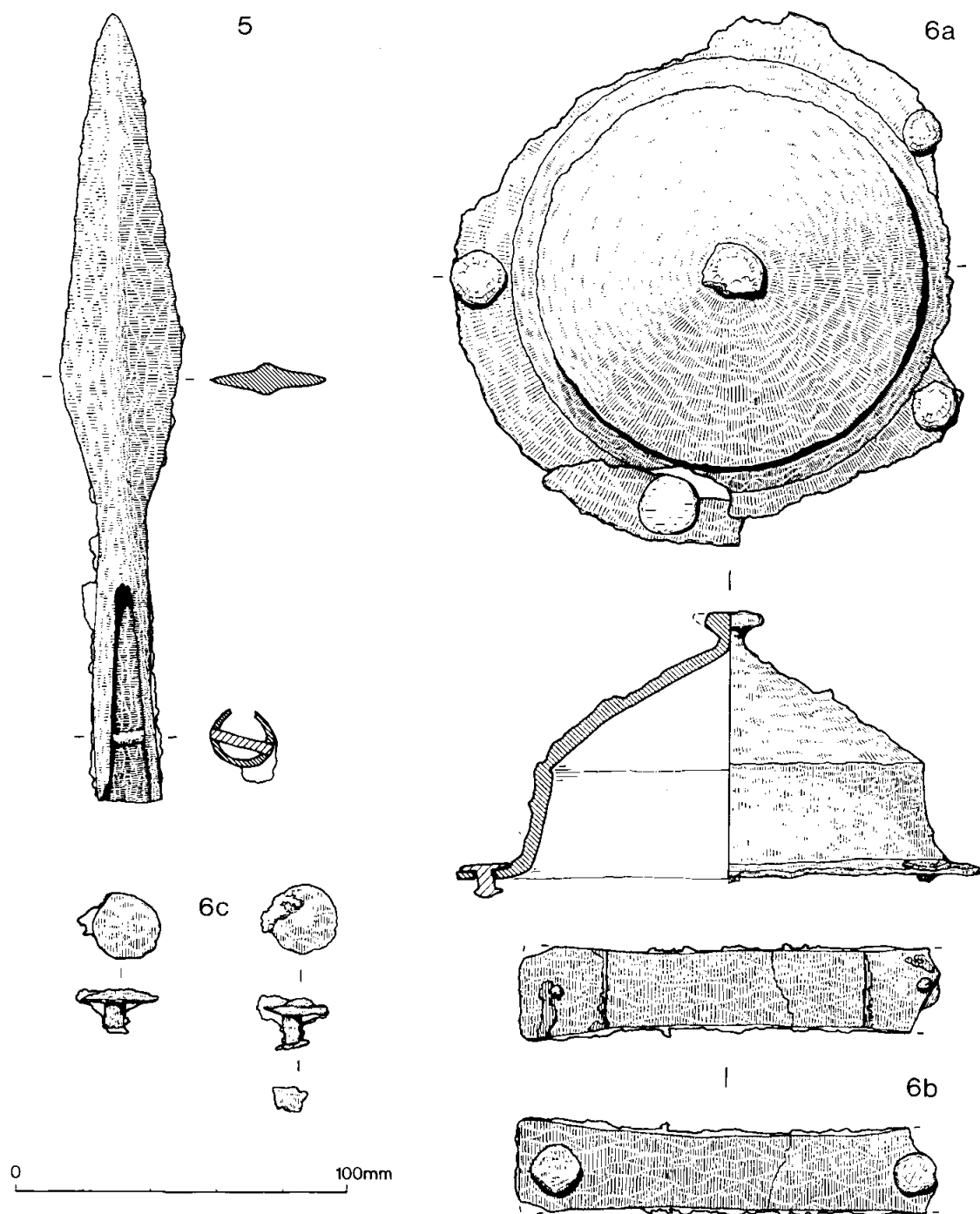


Fig. 5 Finds from the Tidworth grave (scale 1:2)

- (14) Fragment of antler comb; from skeleton 3 or 4.
- (15) Animal bones (shaft of long bone, cattle tooth).

SKELETAL EVIDENCE (by J.I. McKinley)

Methods

Age was assessed from the degree of epiphyseal fusion (McMinn and Hutchings 1985; Webb *et al.* 1985), patterns of degenerative changes in the pubic symphyses (Brooks 1955), tooth wear patterns (Brothwell 1972), and the general degree of cranial suture fusion and degenerative changes to the bone. Sex was assessed from the sexually dimorphic traits of the skeleton (Bass 1987).

Cranial, platymeric and platycnemic indices were calculated where possible. Cranial measures were taken according to Bass (1987). Stature was estimated using Trotter and Gleser's regression equations (1952; *id* 1957). Pathological lesions and morphological variations (non-metric traits) were recorded, and diagnoses suggested where appropriate. The anatomical terminology used is according to Gray (1977) and McMinn and Hutchings (1985).

In addition to the report below, an archive report has been compiled, including skeletal records sheets showing identified bones, metrical data sheets including attrition charts, and detailed descriptions of pathology.

Skeletal data

Skeleton 1 [SF 18]

Bone recovery: c. 90%.

Age: older mature adult (30–45 years).

Sex: male.

Stature: 175.20 cm (c. 5'9").

Pathology: Calculus, periodontal disease; cribra orbitalia; osteo-arthritis (costo-vertebral, right and left hip joints, right proximal tibia-fibula joint, sacro-iliac); degenerative disc disease (cervical); Schmorl's nodes (lower thoracic); pitting (right clavicle articular surfaces); exostoses (patellae, left proximal tibia, calcanea, left proximal ulna, left radial tuberosity, ischial tuberosities); osteophytes (left patella, calcanea, left distal humerus, left proximal ulna, cervical articular facets, thoracic

articular facets, thoracic vertebral bodies, lumbar vertebral bodies, sacral body); eburnation (distal metatarsals).

Morphological variation: calcaneal double facets; Wormian bones; sixth lumbar vertebra.

Skeleton 2 [SF 19]

Bone recovery: c. 95%.

Age: younger mature adult (25–30 years).

Sex: male.

Stature: 179.61 cm (c. 5'10").

Pathology: calculus, periodontal disease, dental hypoplasia; cribra orbitalia; spina bifida occulta; Schmorl's nodes (lower thoracic, lumbar); pitting (right first proximal foot phalanx); exostoses (calcanea, right patella); osteophytes (femoral heads, right distal femur, right patella, right proximal tibia); destructive lesion and new bone, perhaps the result of infection (fifth lumbar – first sacral vertebral body surfaces).

Morphological variation: Wormian bones (lambdoid and sagittal); anterior double talal facet on left calcaneum; pseudo-facets on sacrum-coccyx.

Skeleton 3 [SF 20]

Bone recovery: c. 30 % (rest in military trench).

Age: older adult (45 years +).

Sex: male.

Stature: not calculated.

Pathology: calculus, periodontal disease, dental hypoplasia; cribra orbitalia; osteoarthritis (middle foot phalanx); destructive lesion with new bone, perhaps the result of infection (right orbital vault); osteophytes (cervical body surfaces).

Morphological variation: mandibular third molar with five cusps; central groove on superior articular surface of atlas.

Skeleton 4 [SF 21]

Bone recovery: c. 75%.

Age: young adult (18–25 years).

Sex: male.

Stature: 168.39 cm (c. 5'6").

Pathology: calculus, dental hypoplasia; osteoarthritis (costo-vertebral); osteophytes (atlas); exostoses (left tibia medial malleolus); destructive lesion (thoracic vertebrae).

Trauma: fine blade cut in left rib (no healing).

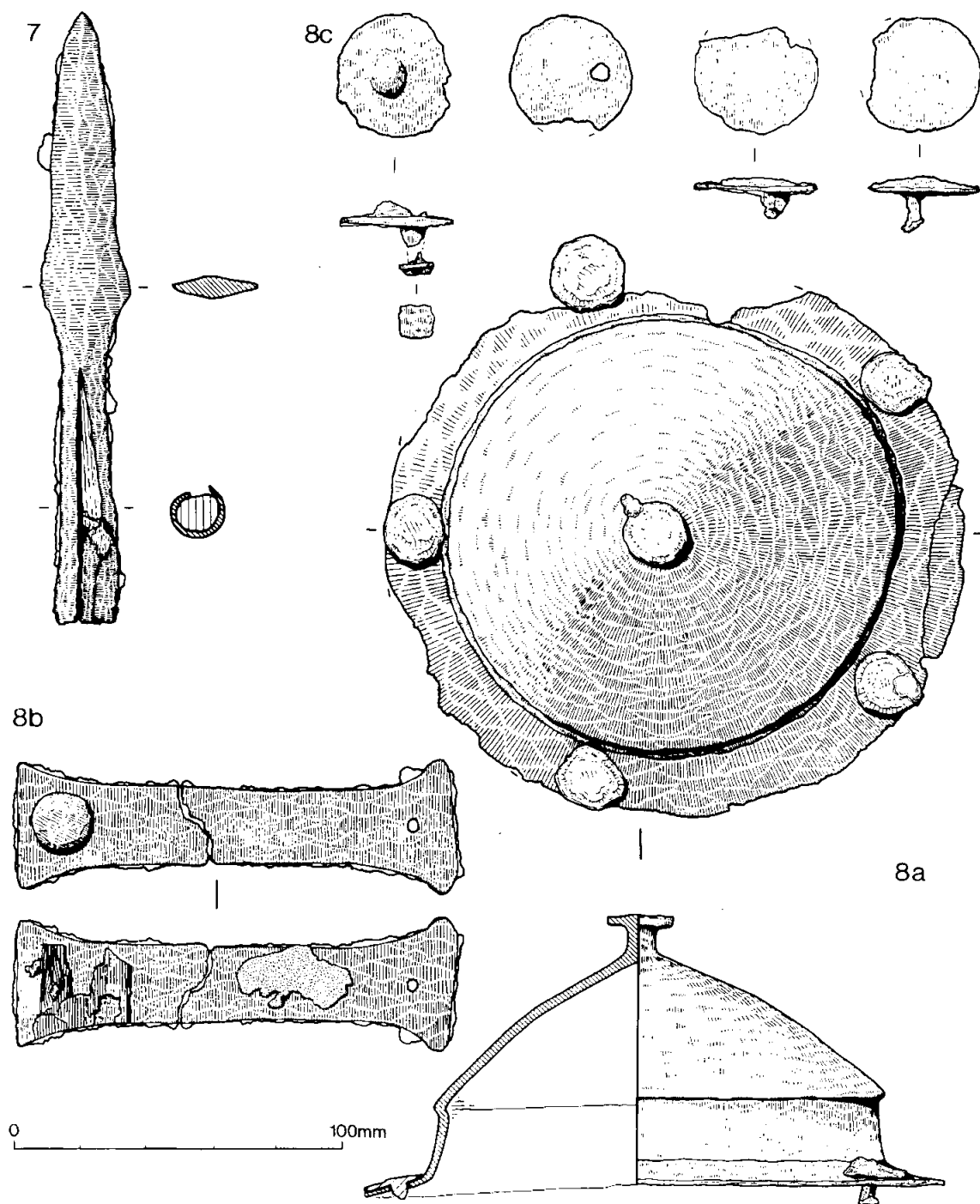


Fig. 6 Finds from the Tidworth grave (scale 1:2)

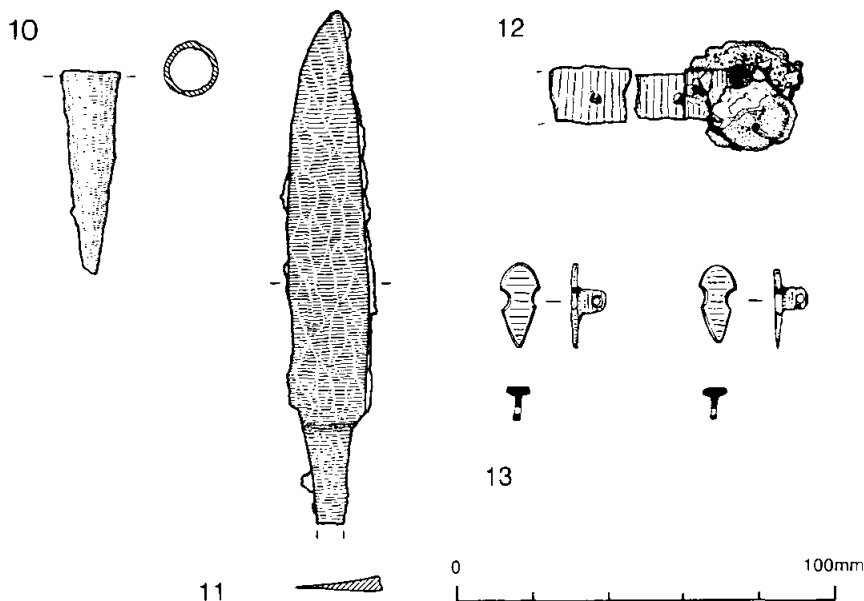


Fig. 7 Finds from the military trench (scale 1:2)

Morphological variation: squatting facet; double neural foramina (cervical).

Military trench backfill

Number of individuals: minimum of two.

Bone recovery: c. 40% (all skeletal elements included).

Age: (a) older adult (45 years +), from skeleton 3
(b) young adult (18–25 years), from skeleton 4.

Sex: both male.

Pathology: osteoarthritis (costo-vertebral, metatarso-phalangeal joint); calcified rib cartilage; degenerative disc disease (lumbar); osteophytes (atlas, thoracic and lumbar vertebral bodies, lumbar articular processes, distal tibia); new bone (distal femur); exostoses (iliac crest, left ischial tuberosity, calcanea, femoral shafts, trochanters).

Results

The condition of the bone was variable, although the majority was in good condition. The right side of all the skulls, which in each case

had been the side on which the head was laid, was in poor condition, and all the skulls were warped as a result of soil pressure during burial. The left forearm of skeleton 2, and the remaining upper limb of 3 were also in poor condition, probably due to variations in the micro-environment of the grave.

Much of the bone was badly fragmented, largely because of the modern disturbance which cut through the centre of the grave. Skeleton 3 was the most disturbed, the military trench having cut all except the skull, neck and left foot. The left side of skeleton 4, and the right arm of skeleton 2 were also affected. Most of the bone recovered from the backfill of the military trench was from skeleton 3, with elements from 4 and probably from 2.

A minimum of four individuals were identified, all males, comprising one young adult (18–25 years), one younger mature adult (25–30), one older mature adult (30–45 years), and one older adult (45 years +). Some of the bone recovered from the backfill of the military trench was small and gracile, which is not compatible with

skeleton 4 nor entirely with 3. The gracile bone is particularly worn which may be partly responsible for its gracile appearance. The upper limb bone from skeleton 3 was also noted to be worn, and it is likely that the bone originates from this skeleton.

Stature was estimated for three of the four individuals and ranged from 168.4 to 179.6 cm (c. 5'6" to 5'10"). All femora fell into the platymeric range, and all tibiae into the eurycnemic range. It was not possible to calculate cranial indices because the skulls were too warped.

Statistical analysis of the frequency of pathological lesions is not particularly meaningful in such a small group of skeletons. All had some degree of dental calculus, mild to medium. All except skeleton 4 had some periodontal disease, slight to mild. The total lack of any dental caries, abscesses or *ante mortem* tooth loss is unusual, and would suggest a good standard of dental hygiene not commonly observed in most burial groups of this period.

Dental hypoplasia may occur in response to deficiency in diet or periods of illness (Hillson 1986); skeletons 2, 3 and 4 were affected to a minor degree. Cribra orbitalia (pitting in the orbital vaults) is believed to stem from childhood anaemia and was noted here on skeletons 1, 2 and 3, though not to any great extent.

Degenerative diseases, e.g. osteoarthritis and degenerative disc disease, and lesions indicative of age-related wear and tear (although there may be other predisposing factors; cf. Adams 1986), e.g. exostoses and osteophytes, were noted to some degree in all four individuals. In no case were the lesions severe, being generally slight to medium, and only in skeletons 1 and 3 were the lesions extensive. There were no indications that any of these lesions were in response to other than normal age-related wear and tear. No lesions were severe enough to suggest any specific stress on particular joints.

Skeleton 2 has destructive lesions with associated surface new bone in the fifth lumbar inferior body surface and the adjacent first sacral superior surface. The lesion in the sacral vertebra is large (20.5 × 21.3 mm, maximum 7 mm deep), situated in the right dorsal margin with neural foramen, with some surface new bone adjacent to the right

of the lesion. Some kind of infection is indicated, with its focus in the first sacral vertebra; the specific nature of the infection is unclear. A destructive lesion (7 mm diameter, c. 2 mm maximum depth) was noted in the right lateral orbital vault of skeleton 3, situated 4.5 mm distal to the orbital margin. The lesion has uneven borders and some associated disorganised (reactive?) new bone; an infection is suggested.

The only evidence of trauma was in one left rib of skeleton 4 which has a sharp cut mark (from a fine blade, perhaps a knife) situated 64.6 mm from the medial articular surface. Probably a central rib, the cut is at a medial angle from the superior border, 6 mm long through the dorsal surface, through the superior border and 2 mm medial in the ventral surface. There is no evidence of any healing, and no other bones appear to have been affected. Such a cut could have been inflicted with a downward-angled thrust using a stabbing action, from in front, or from behind if the assailant were left-handed.

Spina bifida occulta, involving the non-fusion of the full length of the neural spine in the sacrum, was noted in skeleton 2. The maximum width of the non-fusion zone is 25 mm in the first segment. There is nothing to suggest any neurological damage, and the condition was probably largely symptomless (cf. Adams 1986).

As may be expected where so many grave-goods were located in the grave, there is considerable iron and copper-alloy staining to bones. Skeleton 2 has extensive copper-alloy staining on lumbar vertebrae and left radius, and iron staining on the left side of the skull and right proximal humerus. Skeleton 4 has iron staining on the lower ribs and vault, and copper-alloy staining on the left side of the sacrum, left lower lumbar vertebrae, and left temporal vault. Some bones recovered from the backfill of the military trench were also stained.

The grave and its context suggest something other than a 'normal' cemetery. That these four males died at roughly the same time is almost without question. Why they died is another matter. The only evidence of trauma on the bone is the unhealed cut in a left rib of skeleton 4. If they did all die by violence, other than in this one instance the trauma must have been confined to the soft tissues.

CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION

Multiple inhumation graves are not unusual in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, but they are normally limited to two or three skeletons in one grave, show a greater gender and age mix, and more variation in the grave-goods. There are very few quadruple inhumation graves from the Early Anglo-Saxon period; and Tidworth seems to be the only quadruple burial of male adults, as well as the only quadruple weapon burial, of the 5th to 7th centuries in England. The closest parallel which can be found is grave 119 in the cemetery of Empingham II (Rutland), containing three male adults and one child (Timby 1996, 127, 166 fig. 88). Two, possibly three of the adults were buried with weapons, but other details demonstrate the difference to the Tidworth situation: at Empingham, the grave was within a large cemetery; the bodies had been squeezed into an irregular grave which appears designed for two bodies, giving the impression of the later addition of one or two bodies; and there was a child, too, possibly a girl, to judge by the amber bead necklace. While the Anglo-Saxon weapon burial rite is, in general, best interpreted in terms of social and ethnic symbolism (Härke 1990; *id* 1992), we may have a different situation at Tidworth, given the unusual nature of the grave.

For a start, the grave appears to be isolated, not part of a 'community cemetery'. Trial trenches from the grave to the south and east were completely empty, and while they were too short (cf. above) to be conclusive, they were as long as the topographical situation allowed. It is unlikely that further burials are located south, west or north of the grave. If there are further graves in the vicinity, they would have to be to the east, under the trackway, in which case one might have expected that some evidence would have turned up through disturbance in previous years. The possibility of an isolated burial is emphasized by the fact that the grave diggers appear to have chosen a location at the end of a Roman lynchet (Fig. 1), which itself lies at the end of a natural spur, thus creating the impression of a barrow, an impression which, at the time of the burial, would have been enhanced by the substantial amount of backfill on top of the grave.

Other local evidence does not appear to link up with this grave. There is an unexcavated barrow, probably prehistoric, 200 m south along the trackway and a bit further down the slope. A curious triple inhumation burial, including a prone adult and a possibly bound infant, was discovered in 1983 on the eastern side of Warren Hill (SU 24654820; Allen and Anderson 1990). The absence of grave-goods makes dating this grave impossible; but even if it were Saxon (which is anything but certain), it is highly unlikely to have been linked to the quadruple weapon burial, given the distance of more than 500 m. A single weapon burial was found in 1939 on Perham Down (SU 246494; Meaney 1964, 271), some 900 m NNE of the Tidworth site, and dated to the 7th century (see Meaney and Hawkes 1970, fold-out facing p. 1). Its date and distance rule out any direct connection with the Tidworth burial.

An Anglo-Saxon settlement which the quadruple burial might relate to is not known from the vicinity, but this is true for many burial sites of this period. The nearest ordinary cemeteries which represent settled communities of the late 5th to early 7th century are located in the Bourne valley several kilometres to the north and south of Tidworth, at Collingbourne Ducis (c. 5 km north; Gingell 1975/76) and possibly at Shipton Bellinger (c. 3 km south; Meaney 1964, 100: date uncertain).

The apparent absence of a local context requires a discussion of the historical context if we want to find an interpretation for this grave. As the discussion of the artefact types has shown (see above), its date is most likely to fall into the middle decades of the 6th century. It is for this period that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports the resumption, after a lull, of Saxon expansion in what was to become Wessex, starting with the battle of *Searoburh* (Old Sarum) in AD 552 (Whitelock 1979, 156). While the detailed chronological framework of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is no longer considered credible, the broad picture of comparative peace in the earlier 6th century, followed by renewed warfare and hostilities in the later 6th century, is still accepted by historians on the basis of supporting evidence from Gildas and Bede (cf. Sims-Williams 1983a; *id* 1983b). The artefactual date of the grave would place it in this period of

renewed warfare; and the reported battle site of Old Sarum (which was quite possibly a focus in the post-Roman period, given its location at the junction of Roman roads and the existence of earthworks there) is 19 km SSW of the Tidworth site, and visible from there on a clear day.

Thus, the Tidworth quadruple weapon burial may well be the grave of four men killed in the context of military activity connected with the recorded warfare in this region in the middle and later 6th century AD. One cannot exclude the possibility that these four are all members of one family who were killed at the same time in a feud

between local communities or families, but there is nothing in the skeletal record to suggest a family relationship between the four individuals, nor is there the context of a local community cemetery one might expect in such a case.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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