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THE RADIOCARBON DATING OF HUMAN REMAINS FROM SEVEN SITES IN NORTH HAMPSHIRE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RESULTS FROM OLD BASING

By JANE KING *and* GARRARD COLE

ABSTRACT

Radiocarbon dating of burials from seven sites in North Hampshire returned Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon results. The Saxon dates for three sites in Old Basing provide important evidence for settlement here in the Early Medieval period. The human remains selected for dating were assessed and two cases of interesting trauma pathology are explored in detail.

INTRODUCTION

A generous grant from the Hampshire Field Club in 2014 enabled the radiocarbon dating of excavated human remains collected over a long time span and held by the Hampshire Cultural Trust. Seven sites were selected, applying the criteria that the human remains, although formal burials, were isolated and undated. Three sites in Old Basing and one at nearby Cowdery's Down had suspected Civil War connections. A further three sites were accidental finds from a wider geographical area: Weyhill, South Tidworth and Basingstoke.

At all the sites except one the human remains had been assessed previously by different specialists. The opportunity was taken to reassess the selected material using a consistent and current assessment methodology. The archives of all seven sites are held by the Hampshire Cultural Trust and the archive accession numbers are used as identifiers in the results table and on the location map. A summary of each site and the original human

Table 1 Radiocarbon dates sorted chronologically by period (*combined OxA-31554 and OxA-31555 as per Shennan 1997)

Identification Code	*Sample*	*13C*	*Uncal Date*	*Error*	*Calibrated Date*		*Period*
					Earliest	*Latest*	
OxA-31380	A1983.24	–20.48	2477	28	770 BC	435 BC	Iron Age
OxA-31554/5	A1978.1.3	–19.14	1765*	27.5*	144 AD	378 AD	Romano-British
OxA-31378	A1978.1.5	–20.14	1716	28	250	390	
OxA-31381	A1991.21	–20.15	1677	27	260	420	
OxA-31377	**A1972.96**	**–20.32**	**1305**	**28**	**660**	**770**	Anglo-Saxon
OxA-31465	**A1985.9**	**–19.50**	**1244**	**24**	**680**	**870**	
OxA-31382	A1999.78	–20.02	1230	26	690	880	
OxA-31379	**A2004.13**	**–19.49**	**1025**	**27**	**970**	**1115**	

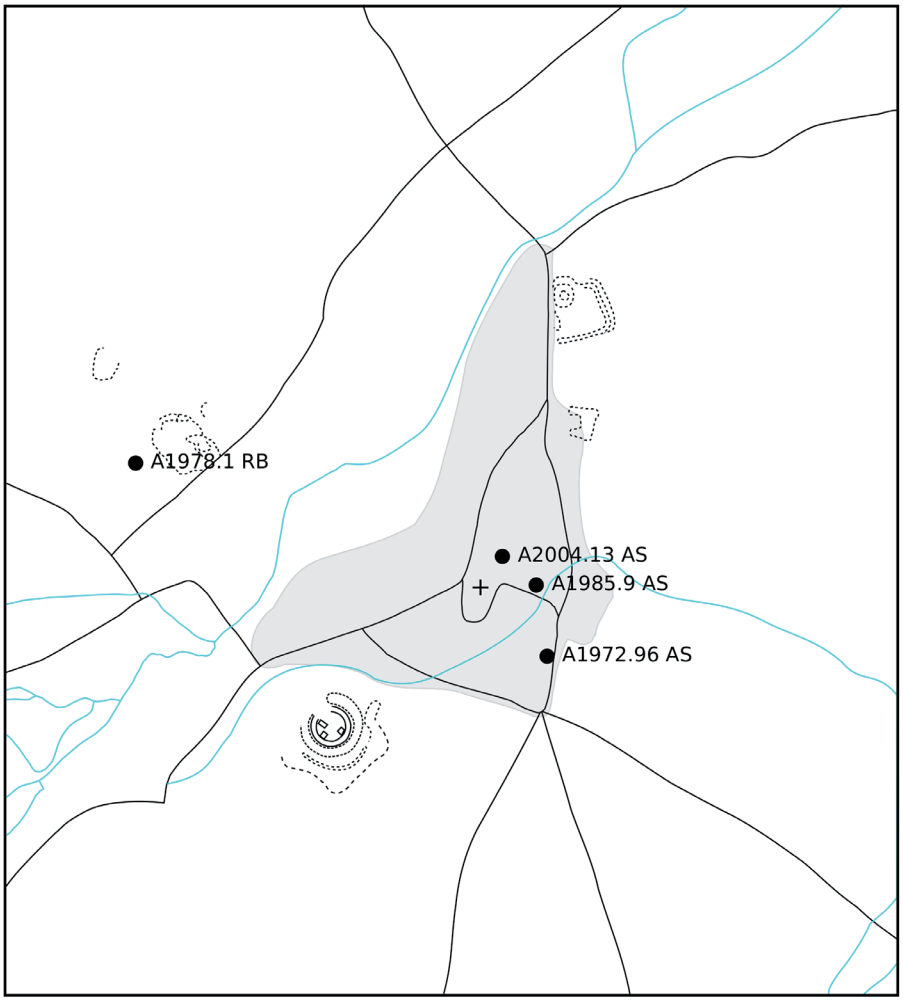


Fig. 1 A map of Old Basing showing the location of the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon sites in relation to the site of the church, the site of the later earthworks at Basing House (south-west), Oliver's Battery (north) and the pits at Cowdery's Down (north west). The grey area shows the possible extent of the occupied areas of Old Basing in pre-industrial times. The sites are identified by their accession numbers – A1972.96 Milking Pen Lane, A1978.1 Cowdery's Down, A1985.9 Appletree Cottage, and A2004.13 7 Manor Lane

bone report is followed in each case by the reassessment.

The results (Table 1)

The results of the radiocarbon dating are listed in Table 1. They are grouped according to the broad archaeological period into which they fall; the Old Basing sites are shown in bold type. Two results were supplied for specimen A1978.1.3. This is therefore represented as an average uncalibrated date and the root-mean-square error value. The samples are identified by their unique Oxford calibration codes.

The sites at Old Basing and Cowdery's Down (Fig. 1)

In April 2004, Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS) conducted an emergency

watching brief in Manor Lane, Old Basing, following the discovery of a skeleton during the digging of a soakaway for a new garage (Coles 2004). The excavation and examination of the human remains identified a second burial and further disarticulated human bones. Of particular interest was the severe trauma to the right femur of the original skeleton. It was not possible to date the burials with any confidence, beyond suggesting a broad medieval date.

When the excavation archive was deposited with the County Museums Service it prompted the re-examination of two other incidents of undated human remains from Old Basing; Appletree Cottage, 1985 and Milkingpen Lane, 1972. The expectation was that some or all of these chance finds from the centre of the village might represent casualties of the Civil War siege of Basing House.

Such is the power of the story of this long, and ultimately bloody, conflict that when each of these burials was discovered a Civil War connection was suggested by the excavators. Similarly, two undated burials found during the excavations at Cowdery's Down, almost certainly the site of a Parliamentary siege camp, were tentatively linked to the same event (Millett & James 1983).

7 Manor Lane, Old Basing ***A2004.13***

The TVAS excavation at 7 Manor Lane (SU 6664 5295) is published as an online report (Coles 2004). It was limited to the extent of the 1m × 1m soakaway that had revealed the human remains and extended only to expose the complete skeleton. The skull of a second articulated skeleton was removed, but the rest of this individual was left *in situ*. The complete skeleton was supine, head to the west, with arms and legs extended. The limbs were tight to the body, suggesting burial in a shroud and no coffin fittings were found. The fill which contained the articulated remains did not appear as a single grave cut and contained a considerable amount of disarticulated human bone. Several pieces of medieval or later tile and one piece of Saxon pottery were recovered from this fill.

The report on the human bone by Sian Anthony (Coles 2004) gives the minimum number of individuals present as six. The articulated skeleton is identified as that of a young adult, 20–25 years old, whose sex is not easy to determine since the pelvic area was largely destroyed during the original discovery. The individual has more male than female characteristics although the skeleton is described as 'gracile'. Of particular interest is the right femur which exhibits severe injury involving a compound fracture and subsequent infection of both the broken bone and the new bone growth around it. This injury is clearly visible in Fig. 2.

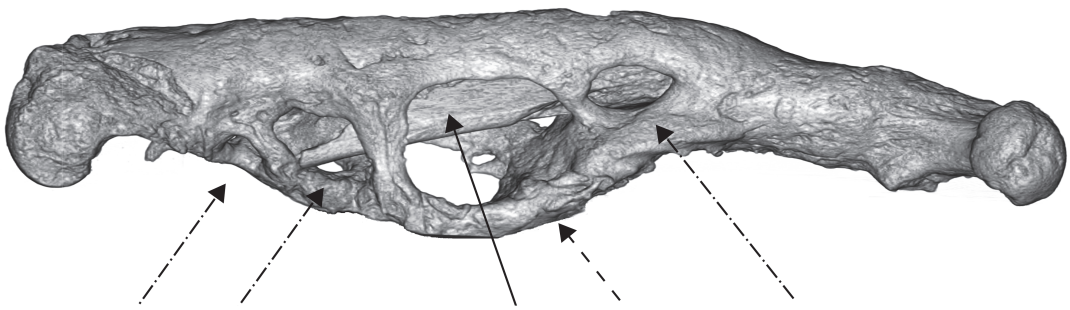
Coles suggested that the large amount of disarticulated bone in the vicinity, and the proximity of at least one more articulated burial, indicates a closely-packed burial ground. The site is near the present churchyard (Fig. 1) and may be part of a former graveyard extension, or an un-consecrated secondary graveyard. No dating could be applied with any confidence, but a broad medieval date was suggested.

Additional report on the pathology *by Garrard Cole*

The pyogenic osteomyelitis observed in the individual A2004.13 is truly remarkable (see Figure 2). It has all three characteristic features of the condition. There is obvious and massive new bone growth (dashed arrow, Fig. 3). This is obvious to the naked eye at the rear of the shaft, with numerous massive arches of ossified material partially enclosing a large inner void. There are also numerous rounded channels – cloacae – leading from the inner void to the surface (dot-dash arrow in Fig. 3). These serve to allow pus and inflammatory fluids to drain away from the central zone to the skin surface. Finally, there is a massive piece of dead bone - a sequestrum – loose in the inner depths of the ossified tissues (solid arrow, Fig. 3). This represents the only extensive fragment of original femur. As its blood supply was compromised it has become necrotic and the body response is to try to remove the dead tissue. The bone is attacked by the normal inflammatory mechanisms of the body, resulting in bone effectively being dissolved away by osteoclastic activity. Eventually the bone fragment would be small enough to drain out through one of the cloacae, assuming the person had lived long enough.

Fig. 2 (*left*) The articulated inhumation burial discovered at 7 Manor Lane. The burial was discovered during building works when a human left femur was found during the excavation of a 1m square drainage pit. The femur was transferred to Basingstoke Police. The test pit was subsequently enlarged to expose the whole skeleton which was subsequently exhumed under Home Office licence. The markedly abnormal appearance of the right femur is clear, as is the absence of the left femur

Fig. 3 (*below*) 3D image of femur seen from the body centreline. The knee end of the femur is to the left and the hip joint is to the right. The front of the femur lies upward and the back of the femur lies downward. Significant pathological features confirming pyogenic osteomyelitis are marked by arrows (solid arrow – sequestrum, dashed arrow – new bone, dot-dash arrows – cloacae). The sequestrum is a fragment of dead bone totally isolated from the rest of the femur. The cloacae are routes by which the pus within the soft tissue would drain to the surface of the skin. There is a distinct angulation of the shaft beyond the rightmost cloaca. This indicates a pathological fracture of the femur shaft. The femur was scanned using a GE 64 slice Lightspeed VCT operated at 140 kV, 435 mA and configured to produce 0.63 mm slice thickness. The CT scan data was subsequently processed in 3D Slicer for interpretation and to generate digital data suitable for producing 3D models



The CT scan revealed the internal bone structure is even more complex. Most of the material that appears to be femur shaft is actually lower density new bone. Other than the unaffected femoral head and knee articulations, the largest fragment of original bone is the sequestrum. The only other fragments of original femur shaft are represented by small pieces encapsulated in pockets within the new bone. In addition, the new bone appears to have developed around and enclosed a small foreign body which must have entered the soft tissue at some earlier stage. This turns out to be a small pellet of iron, a few millimetres long. There is also a very deep pressure-eroded zone of bone in the femur above and behind the knee (lower left corner of Fig. 3). The popliteal artery supplying blood to the lower part of the leg passes through this area. The pressure erosion is most likely the result of a popliteal aneurysm. The artery wall gradually stretches and thins. If untreated, such aneurysms eventually and inevitably rupture with massive rapid blood loss. The aneurysm may have been triggered by the original event responsible for the pyogenic osteomyelitis.

This condition represents a long-standing case of the condition. Bacteria can reside in abscesses or dead bone fragments, resulting in periodic flare-ups of symptoms over months or even years. The individual probably lived several years with this infected leg. It is difficult to appreciate the state of the surrounding soft tissue. The presence of degenerative joint disease at the hip and ankle of the affected leg is unusual for a young individual, as is the presence of significant muscle attachment markings. All of these factors suggest that the person was active for some considerable time in spite of the dramatic changes that occurred to his leg.

There are four routes of development for this kind of infection i) haematogenous spread, ii) spread from a local source of infection, iii) direct implantation of infected material, and in modern cases, iv) the result of post-operative infection. In haematogenous spread, bacteria may originate in gastric, genitourinary or pulmonary systems. These are the more common routes for younger individuals aged 3 to 15 years. The infection can affect single or multiple bones, with a higher prevalence of multiple affected bones in infants. The long tubular bones of the humerus, femur and tibia are most commonly affected sites. Local infection most commonly happens in the hands, feet, face, typically through pricking actions, setting on something sharp or dental problems respectively. Local infection is also possible following trauma, human and animal bites. Animal bites are commonly deep and extensive. Direct implantation is especially common in injuries to the foot, following open fractures, and subsequent to dislocation (Resnick & Niwayama 2002). The chronic nature of this case, along with the presence of minimal change to femoral length or angulation suggests a non-traumatic origin. The presence of a small fragment of iron embedded in the new bone growth suggests the infection may have followed from the presence of contaminated foreign bodies in the soft tissue. The cause of that event remains unknown.

Apple Tree Cottage ***A1985.9***

Apple Tree Cottage (SU 666 528) is situated some 200 m from the church in Old Basing. Extensions to the cottage in 1985 disturbed human remains. These were gathered together by the builder and presented to the police and eventually passed on to the County Museums Service. The site of the burial was inspected by David Allen for the Service and found to be a small area of exposed chalk bedrock with no features, stratigraphy or dating evidence. Sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery were retrieved from the builder's spoil.

Sue Anderson produced a report on the human remains, summarised in the HFC&AS Newsletter 13 (Allen & Anderson 1990a). As the remains had been lifted by the builders before the involvement of an archaeologist they were not recorded *in situ*, so details of articulation and orientation are unknown. The number of individuals was determined by examination of the bones and found to be at least two adult males. The younger individual, estimated to be 35–45 years, exhibited evidence of 'fairly rigorous physical activity', and the suggestion was made that both males might be casualties of the siege of Basing House.

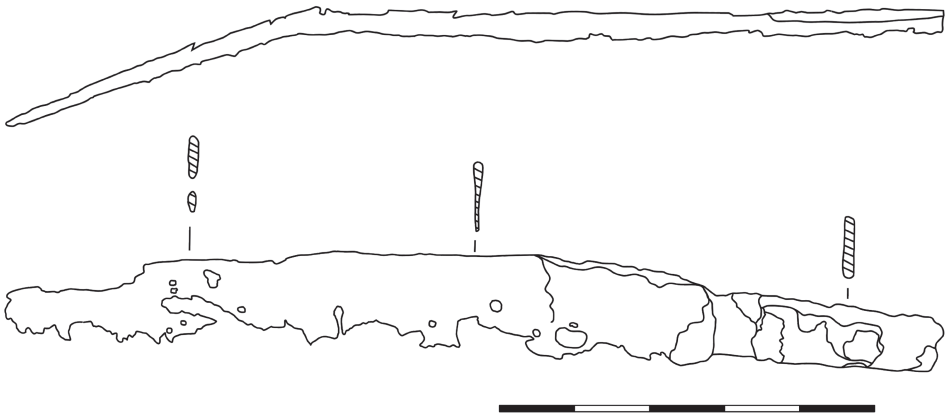


Fig. 4 The scramasax knife from Milking Pen Lane. The knife is shown viewed from the top (above) and from the left side (below). The knife is heavily corroded. Much of the blade has been lost leaving a portion with a very lacy appearance. The cross-section shape and plan in side view form a limited representation of the original blade. Traces of organic handle components may be present in mineralised form on the left side of the tang. The scale is 5 cm long

Additional observations *by Garrard Cole*
Remains from two individuals were recovered. The dating sample was taken from the older individual, probably male, with a development age of 45 years or more. He had lost two molars before death and had slight deposits of calculus. There was little degenerative change to the spine, slight degeneration of the left shoulder, both hips and signs of ossification of the left sacroiliac joint. All of these changes are to be expected in an individual of older age.

Milking Pen Lane ***A1972.96***
In February 1972, human remains were found during the digging of foundations for the new Infant School, near Fiveways junction in Milking Pen Lane (SU 666 527). The discovery was reported to the Basingstoke Museum and is described in Field Note Book Vol VII where it is recorded that bones were found 'at 4.15pm on 22nd February and reported to Basing Police in the person of P.C.105 Smith'! The notebook also records a 'piece of iron' found with the bones. Excavation of the remains was reported in the *Basingstoke Gazette* for 25th February 1972, which stated that *several* skeletons were discovered in shallow graves 30 inches (750 mm) deep and were part of a small cemetery. The possibility was put forward that they were Civil War victims, connected with the siege.

This chance find remains unpublished and no contemporary report on the human remains has come to light, but the original museum box label identifies three individuals, including an adult female of 22 years, 5ft 6in tall and a young adult of indeterminate sex. The 'piece of iron' was identified on the museum box label as an 'Anglo-Saxon scramasax knife' (Fig. 4).

Report *by Garrard Cole*
The sample was taken from a young individual, probably female, aged around 20 years. There are numerous normal variants present in this individual but there is no evidence of dental disease, pathology or trauma. The individual has a number of relatively prominent muscle attachments. Given the young age, these are likely to be the result of extensive activity rather than degenerative changes.

Cowdery's Down ***A1978.1***
The large-scale excavation of this multi-period site (SU 657 533) took place between 1978 and 1981, prior to and during housing development. The published report (Millett & James 1983) summarises the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British evidence and concentrates on the high status Anglo-Saxon settlement, which was abandoned c.800AD.

In 1979 construction work disturbed two

burials. They were fairly close together and within the Early Roman enclosure ditch, each in a grave cut, orientated with the head to the north east. Guy Grainger produced the report on the human remains. Burial 2, a mature male, was extended and face down. Hobnails around the feet suggested a late Roman date, while a sherd of late 16th to 17th century pottery came from the upper grave fill. Burial 3 was a partial adult skeleton, the skull, right arm, tibiae, and feet having been removed by the building work. The age and sex were indeterminate, but of interest was the evidence of a serious wound to the left leg which the report describes as 'consistent with a battle wound' (ibid, 262).

These two burials are discussed under Period 5 (post 800AD) of the excavation report (ibid 262–263) and linked to the Civil War, although the rite of burial with hobnails is accepted as typically Roman. The excavators indicate that the area in which the burials were found was almost certainly occupied by an encampment and gun emplacement during the siege of Basing House, but say that the dating of the burials must remain uncertain.

Report *by Garrard Cole*

The male individual was 40 years or older, with a maximum stature of 1.72 m. His spine shows degenerative changes consistent with older age and strenuous activity. The presence of numerous Schmorl's nodes suggests the individual overstressed their spine at an early age. There is also evidence of spondylolysis on one the first and second lumbar vertebrae. The individual appears to have experienced a perimortem 'blow-out fracture' to the left femur, the result of a high energy impact.

The original osteological assessment (Grainger 1983) reported sharp force trauma to the posterior proximal right femur. The observed change actually affects both femur in the same location, though it is more prominent on the right side than the left. Given this bilateral nature, it is more likely to be a normal developmental variation, in this case at the insertion of quadratus femoris muscle into intertrochanteric crest. Such variants are normally asymptomatic and are commonly seen on modern clinical CT scans (Mellado *et al.* 2014). Alternatively, they may be the result of slight trauma arising from eccentric exercise of the leg. The quadratus femoris brings the leg towards the body on contraction. The eccentric exercise would arise if leg was restricted from moving normally, for example whilst tripping. Such muscle tears are commonly associated with subsequent hip pain (O'Brien & Bui-Mansfield 2007).

There is a distinctive shattered defect to the shaft of the left femur. A note in the excavation archive indicates that this was seen as a post-mortem effect. Close examination of the area is complicated by the presence of fragments glued together. Also some of the fragments seen in the *in-situ* photograph are missing. After consulting with forensic specialists, the consensus is that the defect is a 'blow-out fracture' arising from a high energy blow from the rear. This would have caused a fragment of bone on the exit side to 'blow out' leaving a characteristic bevelled edge, wider on the exit side, along with numerous fractures radiating from the exit hole. Over time, the fracture lines have widened resulting in separation of bone fragments.

The original high energy blow may have been a low mass moving at high speed (such as a sling shot) or a high mass moving at low speed. Either way, the blow-out would have resulted in rupture of the femoral artery at the front of the femur, resulting in massive blood loss and death within minutes (Denton *et al.* 2006).

The second individual is a female, probably 45+ years old, with a maximum stature of 1.62 m. The combination of extensive dental disease, including ante-mortem tooth loss and widespread degenerative disease of the spine suggests the person may have been much older than the upper detectable developmental age of 45 years.

The three isolated sites

Old Kempshott Lane ***A1991.21***

In 1991 builders digging the foundations for a wall at 120 Old Kempshott Lane, Basingstoke (SU 603 515) sliced through the lower part of a human skeleton with a mechanical digger. Following examination by the police,

Fig. 5 Blunt force trauma to posterior right side of the skull from Old Kempshott Lane. There is a clearly demarcated regularly-shaped hole in the right parietal bone with fine fractures radiating from some of the corners. A fragment of the inner table of the skull bone remains attached and in-situ. It is angled steeply inwards into the brain cavity. The presence of this hinged bone fragment (marked by the arrow) indicates this was the result of a blow made whilst the bone was fresh (peri-mortem) rather than the result of post-mortem activity

the Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society (BAHS) were informed and the visible remains were lifted. The upper half of the skeleton was left *in situ* until it could be excavated by the society. This was temporarily delayed until filming could take place for the Society's *Beneath Basingstoke* video. In the meantime, the boundary wall was built, leaving the remainder of the grave *in situ* behind it! The excavation took place over a weekend and revealed a clear straight-sided grave cut into the chalk bedrock. There were no finds to date the remains. The skeleton was lying with head to the north on the left side. The upper right side had been disturbed by burrowing animals and the jawbone of a small rodent was found underneath the human remains. The wrist and hand bones of the left arm were noted as missing, but may have been removed in the earlier lift.

The excavation was reported in the BAHS Newsletter (Heath, 1991) and a human remains report produced by Sue Anderson (1991). She identified an older adult male, of below average height, strongly built and with very healthy teeth. An oval hole on the top of the skull was interpreted as possible evidence of trephination. Since the grave was located 15 m from a Roman road it was suggested that it was a pre-Christian Roman burial.

Report *by Garrard Cole*
This older adult male had a maximum stature 1.66 m. The individual had widespread bilateral prominent muscle attachments on all limbs with a slight emphasis to the left side. There are widespread degenerative changes to the spine, with evidence of unilateral spondylolysis on the right side of the fifth lumbar vertebra. Dental disease is slight, limited to small deposits of calculus and some alveolar resorption. There is evidence of a massive perimortem blow to the right side of the skull, towards the rear.

The original bone report mentioned the presence of evidence for possible trephination to the skull (Anderson 1991). On re-assessment, rather than trephination, there is clear evidence of massive blunt force trauma to the posterior parietal on the right side of the skull. There is no sign of a healing process following the blow. There is a very large fragment of bone from the inner table of the skull still attached to the skull, but hinged inwards at about 45º (marked by arrow, Fig. 5). This is a clear indicator of a traumatic perimortem injury rather than damage arising from post-mortem changes or excavation damage. Whilst technically it is only possible to say the blow occurred close to the period of death rather than being the cause of death, it would have been a fatal wound. The blow may have struck from behind if the assailant was right handed.

Warren Hill, South Tidworth ***A1983.24***
In November 1983 fragmentary human remains were found beside a refurbished army track near South Tidworth (SU 2465 4829). The Police passed the investigation to Salisbury Museum, but since the location was (at the time) 200 m inside Hampshire, the County Museums Service was also informed. A joint excavation by David Allen and Clare Coneybeare found a grave-cut which was fully excavated and the contents recovered.

First to be revealed was an adult skeleton. Ploughing had damaged the skull and most of the lower body had been lost during the widening of the track. The individual had been buried face down with the head to the east and turned to the right. The left arm was extended and the right arm flexed behind the back. No grave furniture or grave goods were found in the fill. Beneath the adult skeleton further fill was removed which exposed the skeleton of a child. This crouched inhumation was laid on the left side, head to the east with the hands in the small of the back and the legs drawn up to the chest, suggesting that the individual had been bound prior to burial.

No dateable material was recovered, although Roman pottery had been found in the immediate vicinity in 1917. The banks and ditches of a field system were visible at the site. A later Roman Christian burial was suggested based on the east-west orientation and the lack of grave goods.

Sue Anderson produced a report on the human remains, summarised in the HFCAS Newsletter (Allen & Anderson 1990b). In it she identified bones from a third individual. The child was estimated to be about 9 years of age. The adult exhibited more female than male characteristics, has a stature calculated at 1.69m, and an age at death estimated at 25–35 years. The fragmentary remains of the third individual allowed for a suggested age of 13–14 years. There was no evidence for the cause of death of any of these individuals and it was not possible to determine any familial relationship.

Report *by Garrard Cole*
The individual appears to be an adult female, maximum stature 1.58 m. Minimal dental disease was present in the form of slight deposits of calculus. Slight degenerative changes were noted to the spine. A misaligned, but otherwise normally healed, fracture was present in the left clavicle.

Weyhill Fair ***A1999.78***
In December 2002 construction work at the Weyhill Fair site (SU 315 467) uncovered human remains whilst removing a concrete floor beneath an existing building. The Police passed the investigation to Andover Museum and David Allen excavated the remains. A narrow shallow grave was identified which cut a small gully and was itself cut by a large posthole.

Excavation revealed an adult skeleton, supine, with the head to the south-west. A partition wall lay over the skull and the lower

legs and feet had been removed by the post hole. There was no dating evidence.

A report on the human remains was produced by Jacqueline McKinley of Wessex Archaeology (McKinley 2004), who identified a young adult male, 22–26 years, with an estimated stature of 1.74m. Faint pink staining was observed over much of the bone. There was no evidence for trauma or the cause of death.

Report *by Garrard Cole*

This was a young adult, possibly male with a development age of 18 years. There is little evidence for dental disease other than slight deposits of calculus on the mandibular dentition. The presence of several Schmorl's nodes on lower thoracic and upper thoracic vertebrae suggest the individual was extensively active to a sufficient degree to overstress the intervertebral disks. The presence of a slight cortical defect on the right humerus suggests the activity affected the right arm as well as the spine.

Discussion

The C14 dating has provided both unexpected results and some which confirm the interpretations of the excavators. The most surprising and perhaps the most significant dates are those for the burials at Old Basing. These will be looked at in greater detail, following a chronological presentation of the remainder.

An Early Iron Age date, 770–435 BC, for the isolated discovery at Tidworth (A1983.24) provides a context within which to consider this double or triple burial. The unusual nature of the deposit, with a prone adult, presumed female, overlying a child who appears to have been bound, adds to the considerable evidence from Hampshire for idiosyncratic Iron Age burial practices. (It should be noted that local authority boundary changes mean that the location is now in Wiltshire).

Romano-British dates were obtained for the burials at Cowdery's Down (A1978.1) and Old Kempshott Lane (A1991.21). In both cases the excavators suggested the possibility of this result, although at Cowdery's Down a Civil War date was also considered. These burials add to the evidence for Romano-British settlement in the Basingstoke area. At Cowdery's Down the burials are sited within an enclosure, while at Old Kempshott Lane the burial is located 15m from the Roman road. Assessment of the skeletal material for this report indicates that this older adult male suffered a severe perimortem blow to the skull. More recent excavation at land adjacent to Old Kempshott Lane recovered an adult female and two neonatal burials of Romano-British date (Haslam 2012).

The dating of the skeleton found beneath the concrete floor at Weyhill Fair (A1999.78) places it earlier than any known activity associated with the medieval and later fair at the site. The date range for the skeleton is 690–880 AD, middle to late Saxon, but there is no contemporary evidence from the locality to explain its existence.

The C14 dating results from the three sites at Old Basing, whilst unexpected, are of particular significance. None of the burials are related to Civil War activity, instead they span a range of dates from middle Saxon to Saxo-Norman. The young adult female from Milking Pen Lane (A1972.96) provides the earliest date of 660–770 AD. A slightly later date of 680–870 AD is given for the older adult male from Appletree Cottage (A1985.9), while the young adult male from 7 Manor Lane (A2004.13) provides the Saxo-Norman date range of 970–1115 AD.

Saxon Basing

The historical record indicates that an important Saxon settlement existed at Basing. Coates (1989 12) considers Basing a place-name type that is relatively early (pre 600), meaning 'the place of the people associated with Basa'. Hinton (1986) discusses the first documented appearance of *Basengum* as the site of a Viking victory in 871 over King Aethelred of Wessex and his brother Alfred. He suggests that the battle took place at Basing because it was already an important royal centre. Whilst this documentary evidence indicates the early importance of Basing, corresponding archaeological evidence has been limited.

At Basing House there were no features predating the construction of the first gatehouse in the 12th century, but the earlier levels did

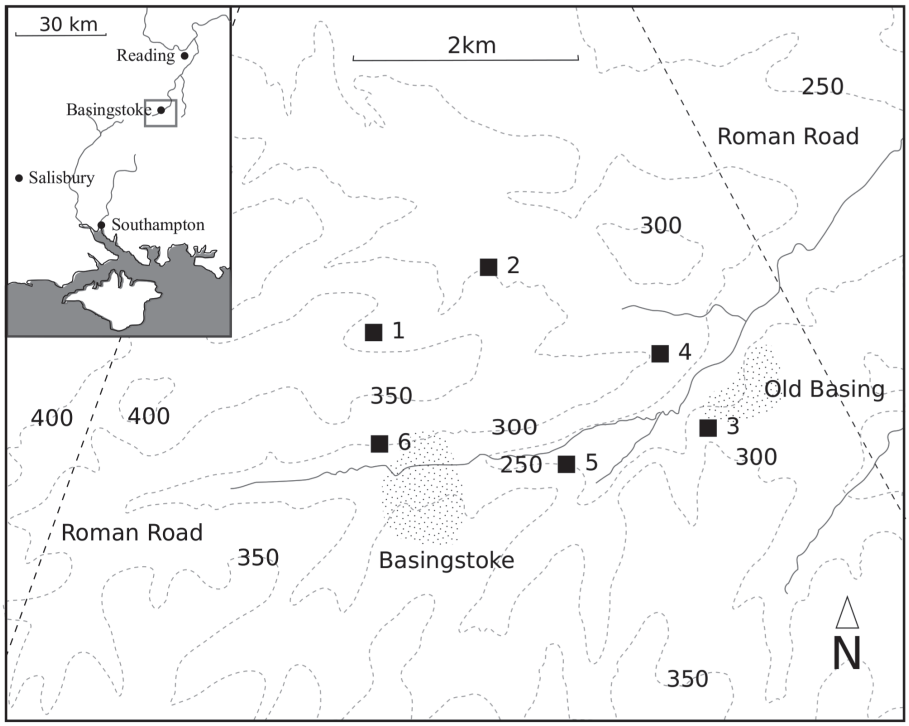


Fig. 6 Map of Anglo-Saxon archaeological sites and find spots in the environs of Old Basing. Key: 1 – An early Anglo-Saxon iron spearhead, 2 – a human skull radiocarbon dated to the 9th century found at Oakridge (OxA–26646), 3 – Anglo-Saxon pottery sherds found in the lower levels of excavations at Basing House, 4 – a high status Anglo-Saxon settlement at Cowdery's Down, 5 – a 7th–8th C settlement at Riverdene, 6 – a rich 6th–7th C Anglo-Saxon burial discovered in 1899 during construction of the Alton Light Railway at West Ham

contain coarse pottery of Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon date (Allen & Anderson 1999, 35). The report notes that Anglo-Saxon/Early Medieval pottery was 'common in almost every phase' of the gatehouse excavation (Allen & Anderson 1999, 63), providing a tantalising suggestion of nearby occupation. A current community archaeology project run by BAHS, which involves the digging of 1m × 1m test pits in the village (M Peryer, pers. comm.) has not yet recovered any Saxon finds. The dating of the three Basing burial sites therefore provides the first firm archaeological evidence for Saxon Basing.

The presence of a minster church at Basing reiterates its importance in the Early Medieval period. According to Yorke (1995, 185) 'the foundation of minster churches was part of the process by which the West Saxon kings turned themselves from being military overlords to being territorial rulers' and this was presumably the case at Basing. The burials at Manor Lane pre-date the Norman church and are an important indicator that the Saxon minster stood nearby. Pre-Christian burial practices and burial grounds were likely to have been abandoned by the early 8th century and one of the privileges of a minster church was to claim burial rights and fees over the surrounding area. Hinton points out that when the parish system was formalised during the 10th century the minster church 'was careful not to lose the prerogative of burial, since it would have entailed a major loss of revenue' (1977, 87). The burials at Manor Lane may reflect this prerogative. Unfortunately, the orientation of the burials at Appletree Cottage was not recorded, so their possible association with a minster burial ground cannot be determined.

The earliest of the Basing burials, those from

Milking Pen Lane, are farthest from the site of the church. The orientation of these burials was not recorded. The scramasax knife might indicate non-Christian burial practices, but the date range of 660–770 suggests that they may have been some of the earliest Christians in the area.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of Saxon archaeological sites in the Basing area. In addition to the pottery finds from Basing House (Fig. 6.3) and the dated burials, a number of sites provide evidence for Saxon occupation in this part of Hampshire. Hinton (1986, 162) discusses the importance of the Basing area in earlier Saxon history, suggesting that it was 'a focus of upper class attention in the 7th century', a time when the shires were emerging as territorial units.

In addition to the well-known high status site at Cowdery's Down (Fig. 6.4) the more recent excavations at Riverdene (Fig. 6.5), provided evidence for a more modest settlement of post-built and sunken-featured buildings dating to the 7th and 8th centuries (Hall & Weaver, 2003). A rich inhumation burial, dating to the 6th–7th century, was discovered in 1899 at West Ham (Fig. 6.6). The human remains and the grave goods, which included a decorated copper alloy hanging bowl, bone gaming-pieces, an iron vessel and weapons, are at the British Museum (Smith 1907–8).

Recent radiocarbon dating has produced a Saxon date for human remains found at Oakridge (Fig. 6.2) during housing development in the 1960s (Cole *et al. forthcoming*). There was an isolated find of a Saxon iron spearhead in the 1970's (Fig. 6.1) and the Portable Antiquities Scheme records a small number of Early Medieval finds from the area around Basingstoke, including coins of Edward the Confessor and Cnut the Great, a copper alloy pin and a late Saxon stirrup-strap mount.

The dating evidence for the burials at Old Basing sets them alongside this evidence for Saxon occupation in the surrounding area and gives a range of dates from 660–1115. The earliest of them would imply that the settlement at Basing was established whilst those at Cowdery's Down and Riverdene were still occupied.

This dating project has produced some unexpected results, particularly for Old Basing. It seemed reasonable to link undated human burials from the area of the village, particularly those exhibiting trauma, with the three-year Civil War siege of Basing House, but the fact that none of them are associated with this event, and pre-date it by at least 500 years, serves as a cautionary tale.

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Authors: Garrard Cole, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY; J.G. King, 1 Wheatland Close, Winchester SO22 4QL