

Human Remains Report for 2011 AGM

This has been an eventful year for the Human Remains Team with significant changes in several areas.

The Living

We had an important change to our MoJ licence conditions. This was a bit like the proverbial curate's egg, good in parts. The deadline for mandatory reburial was put back until 2016. However, the material covered by the licence was extended to include **all** the human remains excavated by the Project to date. However, for the moment, we have a period of stability without the need to actively consider reburials.

We had some personnel and procedural changes during 2011.

Steve Crane decided to move on from human remains to general finds and zooarchaeology.

As a consequence, and after some thought and discussion, I decided to offer a work based learning (WBL) opportunity to a Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) student. Carla Burrell, at the time a second year undergraduate, was the successful candidate. She spent most of the summer season working with me in the bone cabin, helping to complete and extend our post-excavation activities. In particular, and as consequence of some previous comments, we now complete a skeleton inventory as soon as we can after the material is delivered to the bone cabin. The inventory was a specific project for Carla and its success is entirely down to her skills and efforts. She also helped to give the weekly "bone" presentations to our field course students. Carla is now an integral and vital part of the human remains team.

We also recognise and thank LJMU, particularly Laura Bishop and Colin Armstrong, for providing the skeleton storage boxes. These enable us to keep the material in the bone cabin stored professionally with everything clearly labelled and accessible.

The Dead

This year to date, we have excavated 77 skeletons; 42 adults, 33 subadults and 2 currently unexamined.

Of the 42 adults, 18 were female, 14 male, 3 ambiguous and 7 indeterminate.

Of the subadults, we recovered our youngest yet, prenatal at approximately 38 weeks.

From this year's crop of anomalies, along with the usual pathologies and trauma, we have:

SK535 with an arrow head (bodkin) embedded in the chest cavity. This skeleton and bodkin is being thoroughly examined as part of an honours project at LJMU.

SK585 with an extra thoracic vertebra and nominally an extra pair of ribs. However, those ribs may have existed on one side only. This is the 3rd skeleton with supernumerary vertebrae and I shall be looking at all 3 in more detail.

SK571 which is our 3rd "reversed" burial (head at the east end).

Our assemblage at both Poulton and LJMU was examined as part of three external academic projects. Two MSc students, Nicolle Thiemann and Yana Wilson (both from the University of Edinburgh), used them as part of their dissertations and Martina Gagin (University of Nottingham) used them as part of her final year BSc dissertation. A fourth activity by a post-doctoral student from Birkbeck College, University of London was agreed and planned but had to be deferred due to lack of funding.

The Future

Looking forwards, we have a number of activities planned for the next 12 months:

1. We will continue to transfer remains to LJMU for medium term storage. We plan to move the 2010 tranche in the next few months.
2. We will relocate about two-thirds of the Poulton remains currently curated at the University of Liverpool (UoL) to LJMU. Our current plans are to do this by the end of the year. We will subsequently take a full inventory of the remains staying at UoL.
3. We will continue to work with UoL to make the Poulton remains there available to approved third-party academic students.
4. We will produce an updated Skeleton Report incorporating the material since the last edition to the end of this season.
5. We will create a major revision of the Skeleton Manual to incorporate our latest thoughts and procedures.
6. We will consider offering another WBL for 2012.
7. We will revisit the opportunity to create a comprehensive skeleton database with LJMU.

Ray Carpenter, 04-Nov-2011