

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

A BRONZE AGE MULTIPLE BURIAL AT EXNING

by *Edward Martin and C. B. Denston*

In the summer of 1979 Mr R. Bolton of 5 Edinburgh Road, Newmarket (parish of Exning) was looking at a foundation trench that workmen had dug for a new extension on the west side of his house, when he noticed several bones in the upcast from the diggings and, on examining the excavation more closely, he discovered a human skull at the foot of the south wall of the trench. He reported the skull to the police (who declared it to be ancient) and to Mildenhall Museum, who passed the information on to the Suffolk Archaeological Unit.

Through the co-operation of Mr Bolton the first writer was able to carry out a small salvage excavation at the site (TL 6303 6357; S.A.U. index no. EXG027). This led to the discovery of a large multiple grave (half of which had been cut through by the foundation trench) which had contained seven individuals, and a single grave which was slightly lower than the floor of the foundation trench and had thus escaped damage (Pl. IX). The records of the excavation, with the exception of a copy of the ground plan (Fig. 25), were unfortunately stolen, with other documents, in a burglary at the offices of the Suffolk Archaeological Unit in 1981.

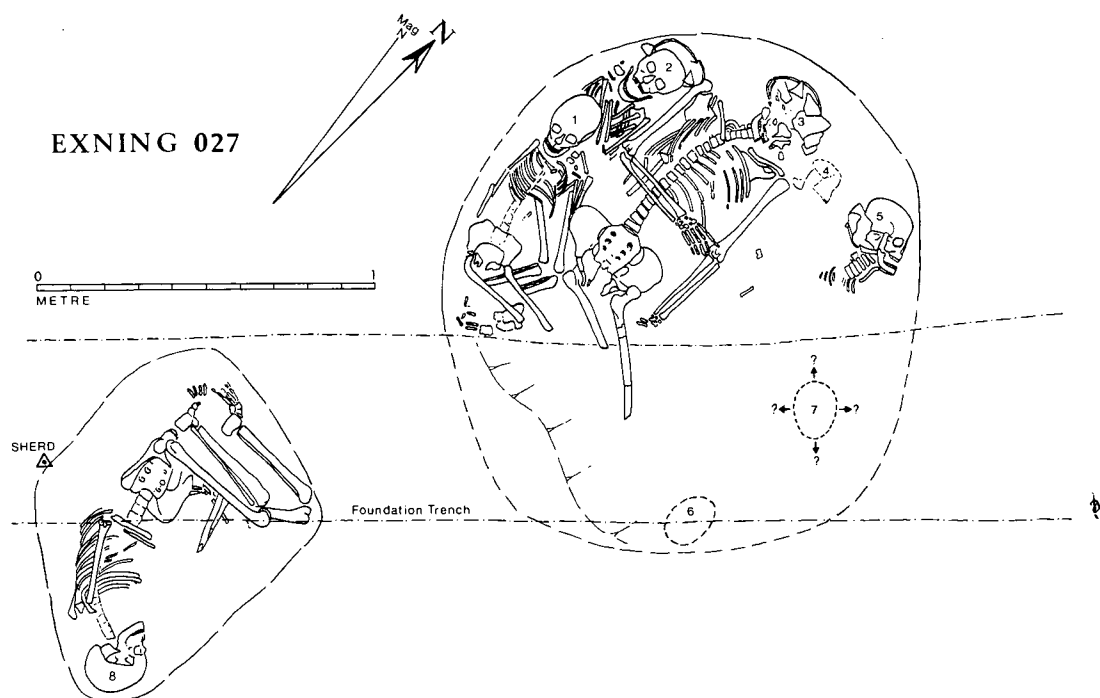


FIG. 25 — Plan of Bronze Age graves at Exning.

Both graves were cut, shallowly, into the underlying chalk and had reasonably flat floors. The main occupant of the large grave was an adult male (Fig. 25, no. 3), aged about 35-45, lying on his back with his legs flexed to the left; he was surrounded by five juveniles, aged between 7 and 11, and an infant. The single grave contained an adult female (Fig. 25, no. 8), aged about 35-45, lying in a crouched position on her right side. The only artefact associated with the graves was a small sherd of pottery with impressed linear decoration, probably Bronze Age in date, which was found on the edge of the single grave. A radiocarbon date of 1570 ± 80 b.c. (HAR-4399) was obtained from the human bones, confirming the Bronze Age date for the graves.

No trace of a barrow covering the graves was observed, but this is not surprising as the graves were found in a built-up area. Barrows are, however, known from the chalk areas on either side of Newmarket (Lawson *et al.* 1981, Figs. 1 & 25) and it is not unlikely that these graves were originally covered by a round barrow.

The individuals in the large grave presumably represent a father and his children who all died at about the same time, most likely as the result of an outbreak of disease, and were buried together. The female in the separate grave was probably the mother of the children, who died either before or after the rest of her family. Comparisons with other Bronze Age skeletons from Suffolk (Lawson *et al.* 1981, 71) suggest that the man, at 5ft 7¼ in, was of average height (the average male height amongst the Bronze Age population of Suffolk seems to have been 5ft 7½ in), the woman on the other hand seems to have been relatively short (the Bronze Age average being 5ft 4in), and that both had reached the average ages of death for men (34 years) and women (37½ years) in Bronze Age Suffolk.

The human bones, by C. B. Denston

No. 1. Cranial and post-cranial remains

Sex: Indeterminable

Age at death: Approximately 9-10 years

Ante mortem tooth loss: 10 deciduous

Post mortem tooth loss: 1 deciduous

Caries: 2-9 deciduous teeth, 1-12 permanent

Abscesses: Nil

Periodontal disease: Nil

Hypoplasia: Nil

Calculus: Slight

Anomalies of the maxillary teeth: the anterior teeth of the right side of the maxilla were in order but the left medial incisor was imbedded between the root of the lateral incisor and the correct position of the medial incisor, the medial incisor unerupted and the crown aligned medial-laterally instead of anterior-posteriorly. Supernumerary teeth in the form of peg-like crowns were situated one each side of the incisive foramen of the maxilla and just erupted through the surface of the bone. Another malformed crown was possibly in situ above the medial incisor at the time of death.

No. 2. Cranial and post-cranial remains

Sex: Indeterminable

Age at death: Approximately 7-8 years

Ante mortem tooth loss: 8 deciduous

Post mortem tooth loss: 1 permanent

Caries: 0-12 deciduous, 0-11 permanent teeth

Abscesses: Nil
 Peridontal disease: Nil
 Hypoplasia: Nil
 Calculus: Nil
 Slight overcrowding of the mandibular incisors. A slight degree of orbital osteoporosis.

No. 3. Cranial and post-cranial remains

Sex: Male
 Age at death: Approximately 35-45 years
 Stature: Approximately 5ft 7¼ in
 Cephalic index: 83.5 (Brachycephalic)
 Ante mortem tooth loss: 0-32
 Post mortem tooth loss: 0-32
 Caries: 4-32 teeth
 Abscesses: 4-32
 Periodontal disease: Medium
 Hyperplasia: Slight
 Calculus: Slight

The vertebrae were very fragmentary but it was apparent that the cervical vertebrae were involved with osteoarthritis. Trauma had affected a proximal phalange (possibly the 5th right). Lesions, bilateral and identical, were situated in the acetabulae of the innominate bones of the pelvis. These lesions were similar to those inflicted by Osteochondritis dissecans as described by Wells (1974).

No. 4. A very fragmentary cranium of an infant, possibly of neonate age at time of death.

No. 5. Cranial remains only

Sex: Indeterminable
 Age at death: Approximately 7-8 years
 Ante mortem tooth loss: 8 deciduous
 Post mortem tooth loss: 1 deciduous, 4 permanent
 Caries: 0-11 deciduous, 0-8 permanent teeth
 Abscesses: Nil
 Periodontal disease: Nil
 Hypoplasia: Nil
 Calculus: Nil

Overcrowding of the mandibular incisors. Slight orbital osteoporosis.

No. 6. Cranial remains only

Sex: Indeterminable
 Age at death: Approximately 10 years
 Ante mortem tooth loss: 12 deciduous
 Post mortem tooth loss: Nil
 Caries: 0-7 deciduous, 0-14 permanent teeth
 Abscesses: Nil
 Periodontal disease: Nil
 Hypoplasia: Nil
 Calculus: Nil

Overcrowding of the mandibular incisors. Slight orbital osteoporosis.

No. 7. Fragmentary cranium only
Sex: indeterminable
Age at death: Approximately 11 years
Ante mortem tooth loss: 0-22
Post mortem tooth loss: 2-24
Caries: 0-22 teeth
Abscesses: Nil
Periodontal disease: Nil
Hypoplasia: Nil
Calculus: Nil

No. 8. Cranial and post-cranial remains
Sex: Female
Age at death: Approximately 35-45 years
Stature: 4ft 11½ in
Cephalic index: 79.4 (Mesocephalic)
Ante mortem tooth loss: 3-20
Post mortem tooth loss: 1-17
Caries: 2-16 teeth
Abscesses: 1-17
Periodontal disease: Medium
Hypoplasia: Medium
Calculus: —
Slight degree of osteoarthritis affected cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae.

Spoil-heaps. Fragments from spoil-heaps and those from the sides of the trench were in the main immature post-cranial bones. It seemed possible that these remains were associated with the three lots of cranial remains lacking post-cranial remains.

The human bones have been deposited with the Department of Physical Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

References

- Lawson, A. J., Martin, E. A. and Priddy, D., 1981. 'The Barrows of East Anglia', *E. Anglian Archaeol.*, XII.
Wells, Calvin, 1974. 'Osteochondritis Dissecans in Ancient British Material', *Medical History*, XVIII, no. 4, 365-9.