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**Romans lose their heads
An unusual cemetery at The Mount, York**

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



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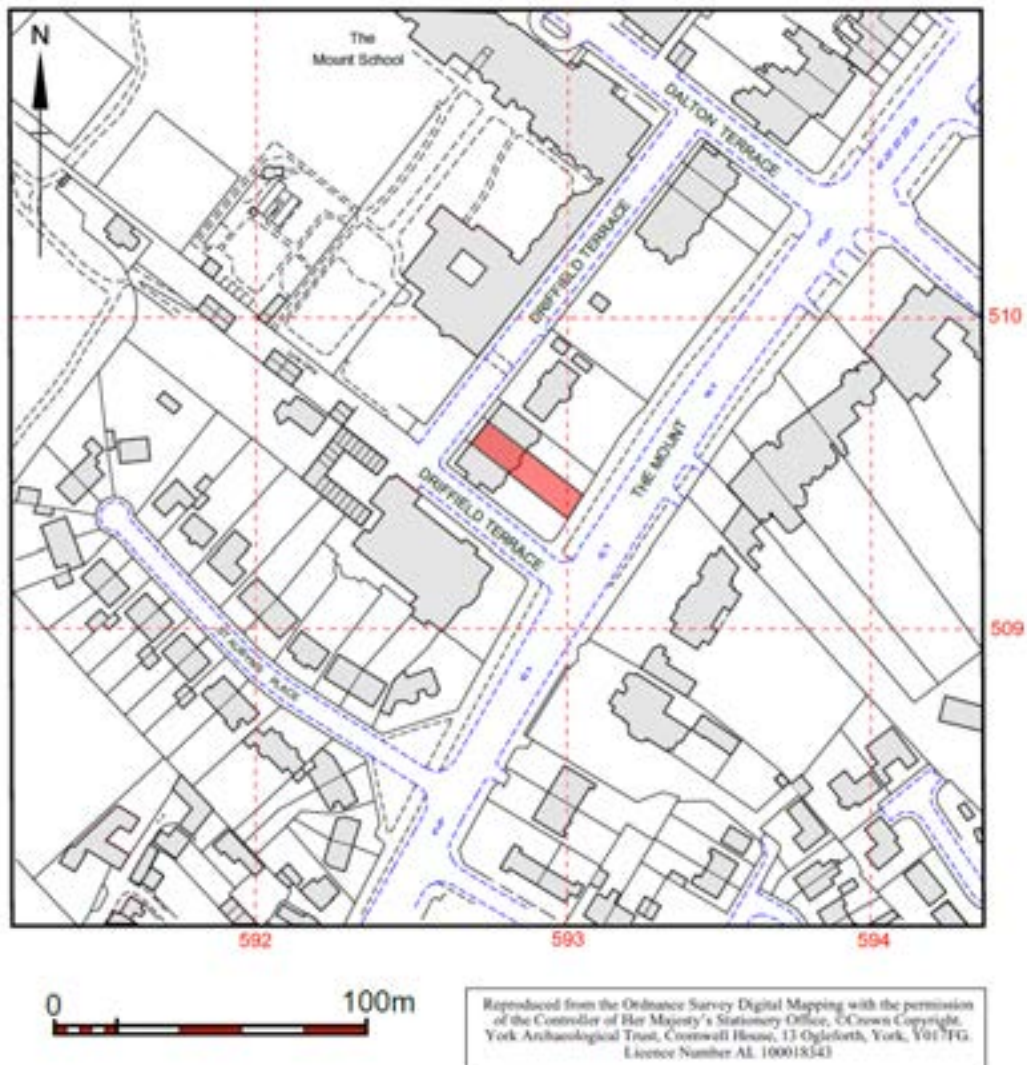
In 2005-6 York Archaeological Trust undertook excavations at 6 Driffield Terrace, York. The excavations uncovered the remains of a Roman cemetery.

This Pdf report represents a copy of a report which was designed as an interactive web report that was originally hosted on York Archaeological Trust's website. Due to changes in the design of this website the original interactive report is no longer available. This Pdf was produced to ensure that the information held in the original report remained widely available.

As the original report was designed for web-viewing, its' design did not follow conventional publication formats. There were some problems when converting the web information into this Pdf. Firstly, the figures, which though perfectly clear when viewed on the web became slightly blurred when transferred into Pdf format. There were no Figure or Plate numbers in the web-text, as the images in question were originally simply embedded in the web-text at the relevant point; the images have therefore been placed as close to their original position in as possible within the Pdf. This Pdf follows the layout of the original web report as far as possible, though a more formal structure had to be imposed with headings and sub headings etc. Readers should bear these limitations in mind while reading the report.

The conversion of the original IADB report into a Pdf file was undertaken by J. M. McComish in July 2018.

Excavations at 6 Driffield Terrace, off The Mount, York during 2005-6 revealed part of the Roman cemetery known from previous discoveries in and around The Mount. At least twenty-three inhumation burials and one cremation were found; most if not all were adult males. At least sixteen of the burials had been decapitations, which is a remarkably large proportion for Roman cemeteries in Britain. Also of note were several multiple burials and the deposition of large quantities of animal bone (mostly horse) with the burials. The burials are thought to date to the later 2nd century and the 3rd century, perhaps continuing into the 4th century.



1 INTRODUCTION

By Kurt Hunter-Mann

Between 20th June and 30th August 2005 York Archaeological Trust carried out an excavation at 6 Driffield Terrace, York in advance of alterations to the garden layout. The site had been evaluated in 2004 by Field Archaeology Services who found evidence for Roman burials beneath post-medieval garden soils (Spall 2005). Subsequent to the main excavation, during 25th-30th January 2006, a watching brief was maintained during the building works, primarily in order to recover any human bone exposed during the works.

All artefacts and site records are stored at YAT under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 2005.513.

1.1 Methodology

The site was in the garden to the rear (south-east side) of the house. The single trench against the south-east face of the house was roughly square and measured a maximum of 6.2m north-west/south-east by 5.4m north-west/south-east. The excavation involved the complete removal of all archaeological deposits within the trench down to the level of natural subsoil which occurred at c.17.4m OD, 1.25m BGL. All features cut into the subsoil were fully excavated. Overburden to a depth of about 0.8m below ground level was removed mechanically, after which excavation was carried out entirely by hand. During the watching brief, some limited excavation by hand was possible in the north corner and along the south-west side in order to recover the remaining or additional parts of seven skeletons, found during the main excavation. These remains had been left in situ so as to avoid undermining the trench sides.



Removing garden soil by machine

The deposits and features, including graves, were recorded as individual contexts according to the methodology in the YAT *Site Recording Manual* (2004). Contexts numbered between 1000 and 1199 were recorded during the main excavation; those numbered 1200 or above were recorded during the watching brief. Single context and other plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, and sections were drawn at 1:10. A programme of full photographic recording of all major features and graves was complemented by a general site views and working shots.

Artefacts and biological materials were collected, stored and monitored for conservation requirements according to standard YAT procedures. Deposit samples were taken as appropriate for the collection of organic materials.

After the excavation ended, the site records were checked and an assessment report on the significance of the archaeological results was written (Hunter-Mann 2005).



Watching Brief – view of the house after removal of brick vault

During the watching brief, the affected part of the south-east exterior wall of the house, notably an unusual brick damp-proofing structure, was recorded by measured sketch and photography. Initial work on the breaking out of the basement floor was monitored, but it soon became clear that the new construction would not extend as deep as the bottom of the bedding for the existing floor. It was therefore decided that further monitoring of this work was unnecessary. Last but not least, limited excavation and recording was carried out in order to recover human burials of Roman date, in advance of the patio construction. It was possible to recover the remaining parts of five burials that had been partially removed during the main excavation in 2005. Parts of two other burials, also partially excavated previously, were recovered.

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

The site lies in Driffield Terrace which runs parallel to and north-west of The Mount, the main approach road to the city from the south-west following the line of a major Roman road. The site is also c. 0.6km south-west of Micklegate Bar, the south-west entrance to the medieval walled city.

The solid geology of the site comprises Bunter and Keuper sandstones, which are overlain by a drift geology that is generally Boulder Clay over Lacustrine clays with deposits of sand and gravel, lying within and over the clay in places (Geological Survey 1967). The ground level in the immediate vicinity of the site sloped down steadily to the south, from about 20m OD on Driffield Terrace to about 15m OD on The Mount. The elevated location of the immediate area is due to its position on a moraine ridge created during the last glaciation, which runs across much of the low lying Vale of York (RCHMY3, xxxvii – xxxviii). The moraine is cut at York by the river Ouse and other water courses including Holgate Beck which lies a little to the north-west of the site at Driffield Terrace.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By Kurt Hunter-Mann

The excavation at 6 Driffield Terrace was undertaken because the site was known to lie within one of Roman York's more important cemeteries. In addition, it was thought possible that other aspects of settlement in the Roman period might be revealed, along with material relating to later periods of York's history.

Note: other sites in York are referred to by street address and /or code in the form 1900.1000. Details are available for those excavated by YAT on the Archive Gazetteer available at www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/gaz/index.htm

As noted above, the site lies 0.6km south-west of the medieval city walls, which are thought to correspond to the line of a Roman defensive circuit around the town (*colonia*) south-west of the river Ouse (RCHMY1, 49). The site is also adjacent to the line of the main Roman approach road from the south-west (RCHMY1, 3; Road 10) which is broadly followed by Blossom Street, The Mount and Mount Vale. It was probably represented by a cobbled surface seen at 7 Driffield Terrace in 1981 (1981.1031). Another minor Roman road, approaching from the west, was thought by RCHME to have joined the main road from the south-west at the junction of Dalton Terrace and the Mount (RCHMY1, 3; Road 11). Some further evidence for Road 11 was found in a watching brief at the Mount School in 2004 (Milner and Johnson 2004).

The principal evidence for Roman activity in the immediate area of the site has hitherto taken the form of burials in a large cemetery which extended along the line of the approach road from the south-west, from at least as far away from the Roman town as Trentholme Drive, almost 1km from the city walls. The cemetery extends at least 250m to the north-west of the line of Road 10 (Dickinson and Wenham 1957). However, apart from excavations at Trentholme Drive in 1951-2 and 1957-9 (Wenham 1968), and an excavation at 35-41 Blossom Street in 1989-90 (1989.21 and 1990.21), most information about the cemetery derives from chance discoveries made during 19th and early 20th century building work.

From the catalogue published in *Eburacum* (RCHMY1, 92-106) it is apparent that the cemetery was in use for the whole of the Roman period and included examples of a great diversity of burial types including cremations and inhumations in a variety of containers, and with or without grave goods or grave markers. Where Road 10 corresponded to the present line of The Mount a particular concentration of funerary monuments has been discovered, possibly because of its location on or close to a natural high point visible at some distance as one approached from the south-west. Amongst these monuments may be noted a vault with a lead coffin found at the junction of Driffield Terrace and Dalton Terrace in 1769. The tombstone of Lucius Bebius Crescens was found in 1911 when the Mount School gymnasium was constructed (RCHMY1, 121), and the sarcophagus of Aelia Severa found with the tombstone of Flavia Augustina re-used as a lid in Dalton Terrace in 1859 (RCHMY1, 128). The tombstones of Julia Velva and Candida Barita were found in 1922 on the south-east side of The Mount when Albemarle Road was laid out. Finally, it may be noted that eight urns, a lamp and a fibula were found in 1807 while gardening at Mount House (see below), and two stone coffins were found under a house in Driffield Terrace near the junction with Love Lane (RCHMY1, 97-8).

A small number of Anglian cremations was found in 1859 on a site immediately to the north-east of the junction of Dalton Terrace with the Mount (Stead 1958), but there is little other evidence for post-Roman activity in the immediate area of Driffield Terrace. In the Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval periods the area appears to have been open land used for agriculture. In the mid-17th century during the English Civil War, a sconce, or fort, apparently sitting astride The Mount, was built a little to the east of the site.

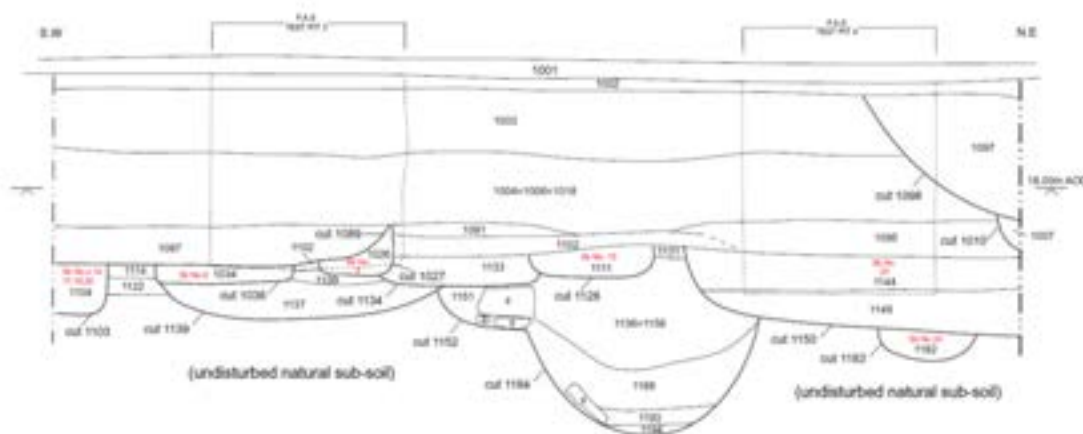
A large mound, designated as a tumulus on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map, lies some 60m north-west of the site; it is currently in the grounds of The Mount School. It is undated, but was described in 1425 as an ancient mound on which formerly stood a windmill (Raine 1955, 309).

In the 18th century two large houses, one known as Mount House on the 1st edition OS map of 1852, were constructed alongside The Mount. The site lies close to the south-west end of the formal gardens of the house. Mount House was demolished in 1865, to make way for Driffield Terrace.

3 INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE NARRATIVE

By Kurt Hunter-Mann

It was possible to separate past activity on the site into several distinct stages; these stages are the basis for the division of activity into the Phases that structure the report. The Roman cemetery was overlain by ploughsoil, which indicates that the cemetery had probably been truncated by medieval ploughing. Post-dating the ploughsoil was a post-medieval garden soil, perhaps associated with Mount House. It was cut by several features, which are thought to be associated with occupation along Driffield Terrace. It was also possible to sub-divide the long Roman cemetery sequence into Phases, although these are inevitably not so clear cut.



The south-east facing section

Deposits relating to the Roman cemetery, overlying undisturbed natural deposits, survived to an average depth of 0.3m. In addition features were cut into the natural to an average depth of 0.4m. It was possible to identify a long stratigraphic sequence of Roman features and deposits, which was characterised by alternating episodes of the digging of features and the deposition of material. These episodes are the basis for the system of Groups which structure the report. Where features and deposits could not be assigned to a particular group due to their imprecise

stratigraphic position, they have been assigned to the likeliest group. [Click here](#) for a summary description of all the excavated graves and possible graves.

All alignments referred to relate to true north, although site north during excavation lay to the north-west. The first compass point mentioned in the alignment of the inhumations is the head/torso end of the skeleton.

3.1 Phase 1 – Natural

This phase (comprising Group 1) was the undisturbed natural deposits, namely a subsoil overlying glacial clays, sands and gravels that formed part of the York Moraine (see the Composite south-east facing section). The top of the glacial deposits was around 17.5m OD (1110 and 1217). The sands and gravels included many cobbles, and were about 0.15m thick overall. They overlay compact boulder clay at least 0.25m thick.

The sandy loam subsoil (1115 and 1122) survived only in places, and was a maximum of 0.1m thick, as it had been much truncated by later features.

Pottery recovered from 1122 suggests that the subsoil was still forming and being re-worked during the late 2nd/early 3rd centuries.

3.2 Phase 2 – Clearance and Dumping

This phase incorporates Groups 2-5 and offers the earliest evidence for a Roman cemetery, notably one grave (1183) and perhaps more; and structures or boundaries that may have had a funerary function (1181, 1191). However, the presence of probable pits (1189 and 1197) and dump deposits suggests that there was also a certain amount of non-funerary activity, perhaps involving the disposal of waste material.

The earliest cuts (Group 2) included shallow features (1117 and 1195) interpreted as tree boles, presumably representing the clearance of trees from the vicinity of the main Roman road thought to lie immediately to the south-east. Pits 1189 and 1197 could have been used for waste disposal. East-west linear cut 1191 could have formed a boundary. It is unlikely that this group represents use of the site as a cemetery. On the other hand, the overlying sandy, stony deposits (Group 3) appear to be upcast material from nearby features rather than dumps of waste.

Of the features cutting the Group 3 deposits (Group 4), at least one was a burial (1187), which was not in a coffin but was possibly decapitated. Other than a possible post-pit (1181), which appears to have re-instated a post at the west end of the Group 2 linear feature 1191, the other cuts in this group are difficult to interpret. Further gravelly sandy layers (Group 5) were probably upcast deposits.



Burial 1187

Where dated by pottery, this activity generally bears late 2nd/early 3rd century spot dates. However, it is likely that the latter groups of activity occurred during the later 2nd century, with the earlier (undated) activity taking place earlier in the Roman period. Indeed, an Iron Age date for some activity is possible, and cut 1189 contained a sherd of possible Iron Age handmade pottery.

3.3 Phase 3 – Possible Cemetery

There are no graves that can be assigned to this phase with certainty, but several features may well relate to the use of the area as a cemetery. Few pits seem to have been related to waste disposal.

The Group 5 layers were cut by two large shallow pits (Group 6) that could have been used for waste disposal, although east-west cut 1176 could be a continuation of the earlier possible boundary feature. They were sealed by probable upcast deposits (Group 7).

The most distinctive of the succeeding group of cuts (Group 8) was a small but unusually deep pit (1184). It was associated with a shallow cut on one side, which apparently accommodated a stone step (1152); this feature is shown on the Composite south-east facing section. Although no environmental evidence could be extracted from its fills, it is interpreted as a libation pit, used to make offerings to the underworld. Two east-west linear cuts and a possible post-pit, in the same position as the preceding east-west features, point to the maintenance of some kind of boundary.

The overlying gravelly layers form a compacted surface at about 17.55m OD (Group 9). These deposits are regarded as material, upcast from nearby cut features, that has been compacted by traffic, presumably pedestrian.

The pottery provides late 2nd/early 3rd century spot dates, but as the same date was provided for the preceding phase it is likely that Phase 3 dates towards the latter end of that date range.



Possible libation pit 1152/1184 looking north

3.4 Phase 4 – Burials including decapitations

Graves dominate this phase, and there is little doubt that the area was intensively used as a cemetery for some time.

Of the [Group 10](#) features that cut the Group 9 deposits, the most intriguing was Grave 1150. This circular cut contained a burial, apparently within a coffin as indicated by iron nails. The lower half of the body was recovered during the main excavation (1175) and the upper part was excavated during the watching brief (1202); the displaced skull indicated a decapitation. It was also notable for incorporating a large amount of horse bones, apparently within the coffin; and several blocks of stone, some of which seem to have been fragments of funerary structures. This feature is shown on the Composite south-east facing section.



Burial 1175 among horse bones (left) and pattern of horse bones in the base of grave 1150 (right)



Grave 1150 excavated (Grave 1183 is beneath, unexcavated)

Although they can be assigned to groups as early as Group 2, it is considered likely that two other graves were actually dug at this time. Grave 1103 was remarkable in containing four individuals, buried in a single coffin (1105, 1121, 1123 and 1125); three had been decapitated, and one also had trauma damage to the skull. The other halves of these burials were recovered during the watching brief (1209/16, 1207/10, 1214 and 1212 respectively).



Burial 1202 with displaced skull



Burial 1105 over burial 1121 and 1123



Burial 1123



Burial 1209, skull 1216 (top), skull of 1214 (middle), skull 1207 (bottom)

It is not clear whether the individual in Grave 1118 alongside was decapitated (1120=1206). Adjacent to these two graves was a large curvilinear cut (1139), which is tentatively interpreted as an enclosure ditch around the graves. The other cut features in this group offer less scope for interpretation, although one series of small cuts could have resulted from the maintenance of the west end of the possible east-west boundary. Compacted gravelly sandy layers (Group 11) are regarded as further trampled upcast material.

The most remarkable of the succeeding group of cuts (Group 12) was Grave 1130. It contained three decapitated individuals (1124, 1126 and 1129), buried in a coffin along with a large quantity of animal bone (1107). A small possible grave was cut by a grave containing a rare undecapitated burial (1112).



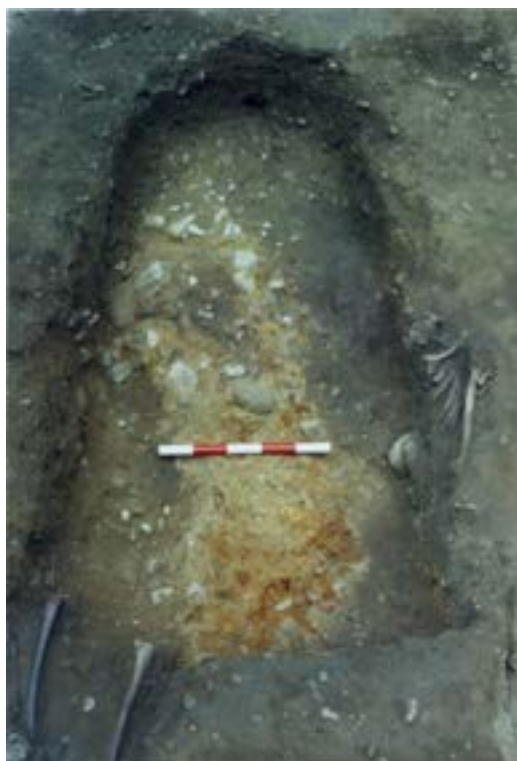
Burial 1124



Burial 1126



Burial 1112, apparently undecapitated



Cut 1061, cutting burials 1086 and 1075/9

The subsequent gravelly layers appear to have been trampled upcast material (Group 13). The next group of features (Group 14) included a grave with two burials, at least one of which was decapitated. Another grave contained one individual, who may or may not have been decapitated. These graves were cut by a large east-west feature, apparently re-instating the earlier possible boundary (1061). There was also a possible pit, cut by a possible grave that contained no human bone.

The overlying deposits (Group 15) were more mixed than usual, perhaps indicating a wider range of activities than the usual trampled upcast material.

The large proportion of decapitations, multiple burials and deposits of horse bones, makes this a remarkable phase in the use of the cemetery. Dating is difficult as much of the pottery appears to be residual. However there is sufficient mid/late 3rd century pottery present to suggest that this activity dates to the later 3rd century.

3.5 Phase 5 – Decapitated burials and a cremation

This was the final phase of surviving burials, and is notable for apparently consisting entirely of decapitated single inhumations, along with a cremation, one of the latest burials.

Several graves (Group 16) cut the Group 15 deposits. All contained single decapitated individuals, apparently in coffins (1035, 1041, 1044, 1055). Other cuts included a possible child's grave, although no bones survived; a post-pit, perhaps for a grave marker; and a possible pit or tree bole.

The overlying deposits appear to have been further trampled upcast material (Group 17). All but one of the next group of cuts (Group 18) were burials (1009, 1025, 1030, 1038=1205); except for one cremation and one incomplete inhumation, the burials were all decapitated individuals in coffins. The cremation (1022) was perhaps the last burial on the site; it seems to have been deposited in a wooden box, and was buried along with a skull that was probably disturbed from an earlier burial.



Burial 1041



Burial 1055



Decapitated burial 1009



Decapitated burial 1025



Decapitated burial 1030



Burial 1044

The burials were confined to the south-west part of the trench, and may have respected 1095, a low mound to the north that appears to have marked the position of the two Phase 4 graves containing much horse bone. Phase 4 east-west cut 1061 may still have been extant and also acted as a north-east boundary to the Phase 5 burials.

This phase is difficult to date due to the lack of contemporary finds, but a 4th century date is suggested on stratigraphic grounds.

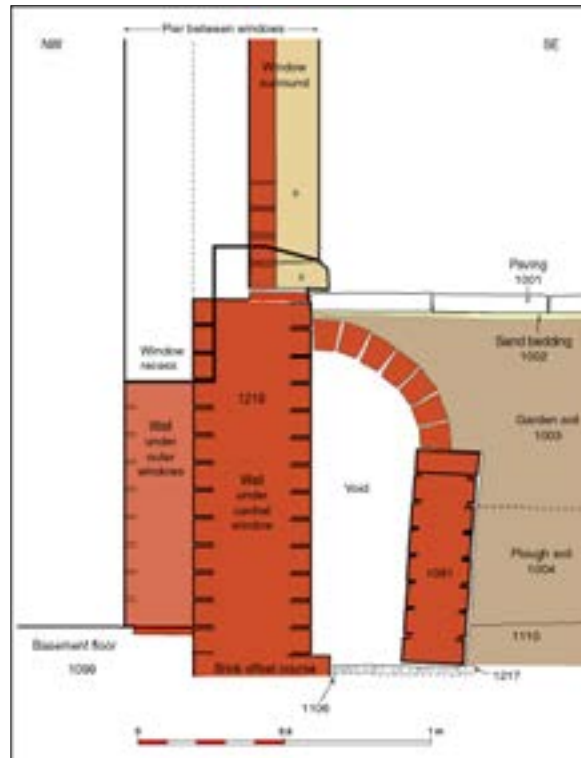
3.6 Phase 6 – Ploughsoil

This phase consisted of a single layer of silty loam some 0.4m thick, which overlaid the burials and is interpreted as a ploughsoil (Group 19); see the Trench section drawing. The ploughing truncated the Roman cemetery, as indicated by two furrows in the top of the Roman deposits which appear to have been part of a ridge and furrow pattern aligned north-west/south-east. Some disturbance of bones and the absence of parts of some skeletons are also attributed to plough damage.

Only residual Roman pottery was found in the ploughsoil, but it probably dates to the medieval period.

3.7 Phase 7 – House and Gardens

This phase represents the development of the area for dwellings during the 18th and 19th centuries, first as Mount House and then as the extant 6 Driffield Terrace. It commenced with a soil about 0.35m thick, probably ploughsoil reworked and enhanced as a garden soil (Group 20). It was cut by garden features; a pit, probably associated with the demolition of Mount House; and the basement wall and floor of the existing house (Group 21).



The south-east wall of the house also acted as the basement wall. It was brick with stone details around the windows (1218). Butted against the wall was an unusual arched brick feature (1081), which was evidently intended to keep the damp of the garden soil away from the basement wall and floor.



Left hand image - Interior view of wall 1218, window recess (left), brick vaulting 1081 (right)

Right hand image – Profile of brick structure 1081 buttin house wall 1218, looking north-east

3.8 Phase 8 – Natural

The most recent activity on the site was the construction of a patio (Group 22) in the late 20th century. It also involved the excavation of the four FAS test pits in 2004, the YAT excavation in 2005, and the watching brief in 2006.

4 THE FINDS

4.1 The Pottery from 6 Driffield Terrace

By Ailsa Mainman

The pottery from this site (fewer than a thousand sherds) was mainly of Roman date although there is a small amount of medieval, post-medieval and modern material from the upper contexts.

The Roman pottery assemblage belongs, for the most part, to the late 2nd/early 3rd century and is mostly domestic rather than funerary in character, suggesting that it mostly refuse dumped over a long period of time.

The most frequent wares include the local oxidized Ebor wares and other regional grey coarse wares. There are imports from elsewhere in Roman Britain, principally from the enormous production centres in the Nene Valley near Peterborough. Imported wares from further afield include a range of amphorae, mortaria and fine wares from elsewhere in the Roman Empire. The most common imports are the samian wares from Roman Gaul but Rhenish wares are represented by Moselle beakers, a rare Speicher mortarium and other possible Rhenish fine wares. The amphorae, as ever, give the widest geographical context with examples from southern Spain and, less commonly, a few fragments of the blacksand Pompeiian type.

4.2 The Small Finds

By Nicola Rogers

4.2.1 Introduction

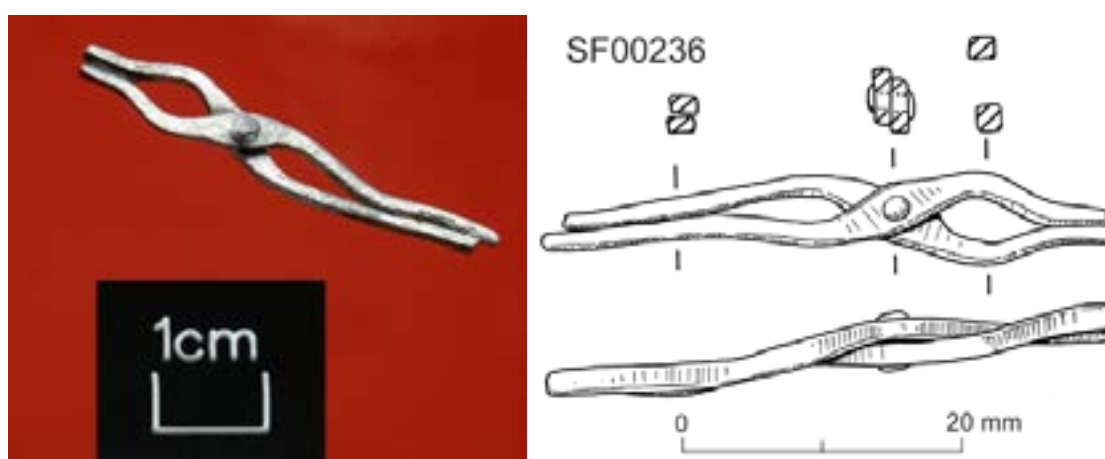
Study of the artefacts from these excavations is concentrated here on a small number of mostly personal items which were recovered, some of which may pertain to the individuals buried on the site, or to the ritual accompanying their burials, although few objects were found in the actual graves.

4.2.2 The Artefacts

The most unusual find from the site is a pair of miniature silver tongs SF236. These tiny tongs are clearly a copy of full-sized iron tongs that would have been used by Roman blacksmiths, with jaws that are slightly bowed and with extended tips (Manning 1985, 6-8, Pl.2). This jaw design was suited to a wide variety of work, and consequently appears to have been the form most preferred by smiths in the Roman period (Manning 1985, 7).

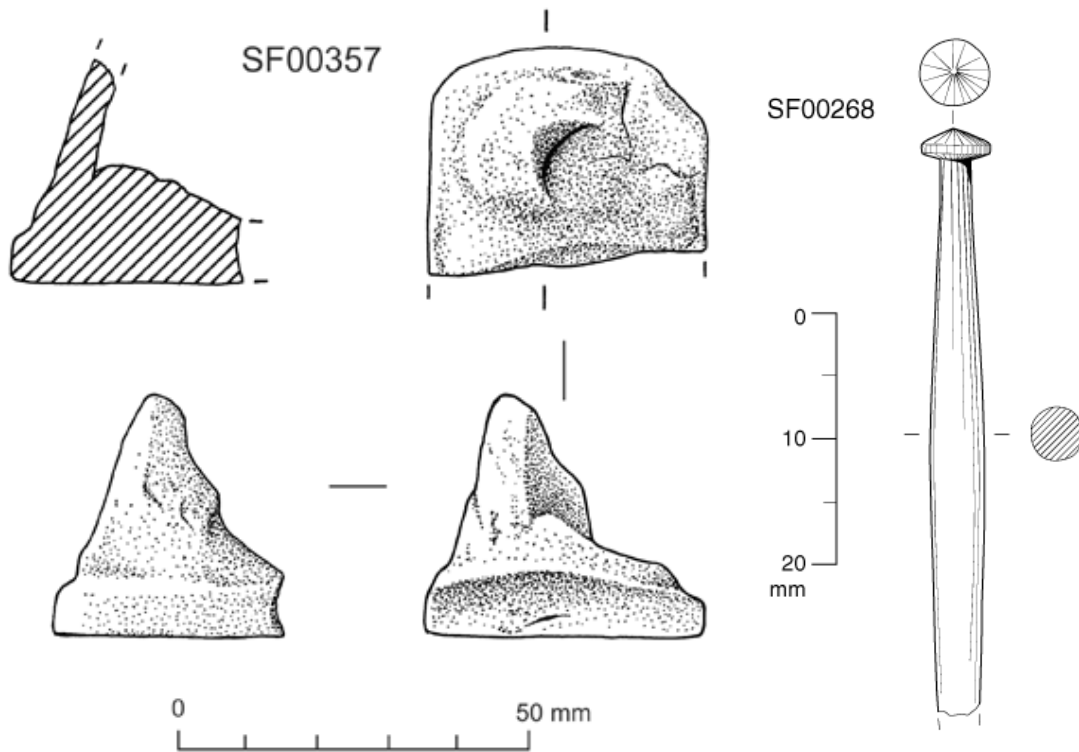
Miniatures or model objects such as tools have been found on both civilian and military Roman sites in Britain, although in the north of England they have more commonly been recovered on military sites. A pair of bronze miniature tongs were found at Great Chesters fort on Hadrian's Wall (Green 1981, 260), and other miniature smithing tools that have been found include a bronze anvil at Brough-on-Humber (Green 1981, 267, no.2) and a lead alloy anvil from Chester

(Green 1981, 267, no.3d). Green suggests two possible interpretations of the models' significance - the soldiers wanted to carry these as talismans, as tools of their trade, or they represented offerings to a deity appropriate to the objects themselves, the smith god Vulcan (or they possibly fulfilled both functions) (Green 1981, 262). Evidence of the cult of the Smith-God has also been found in depictions on potsherds: examples from Corbridge on Hadrian's Wall show the applique figure of a god wearing the conical cap of a smith and grasping a hammer and a pair of tongs while gripping an iron ingot held over an anvil (Green 1978, 19). The tongs were found in a deposit interpreted as a possible grave marker mound (context 1095) from Phase 4, which also produced a bone hair pin (SF268), hobnails (SF232) and vessel glass fragments (SF235) (SF329) (see below).



Miniature tongs

Another object with symbolic significance is a fragmentary fired clay figurine (SF357). Unfortunately, the very abraded base fragment is too incomplete to positively identify but one possible candidate for the figure is a Dea Nutrix, representing the Roman goddess of childbirth: these figurines appear to have been cheap and mass produced, and may have been bought by women as protection in childbirth (Green 1978, 17). These have been found previously in York, for example at Wellington Row (1987.24 sf2991), and at Tanner Row (1983.24 sf2483). Alternatively, the figure could have been of Venus, who perhaps acted as a fertility symbol, or was for luck in childbirth (Green 1978, 16). These have sometimes been found in graves, possibly indicating that the luck had not been good (Green 1978, 16). A Venus figurine was found at Tanner Row, York (1983.24 SF2275). Green notes that neither of these forms of figurine were necessarily associated solely with women, both goddesses being popular also amongst soldiery (Green 1978, 16-17). SF357 was found residually in Phase 6 (medieval) ploughsoil (context 1018).



Fragment of clay figurine and a bone pin

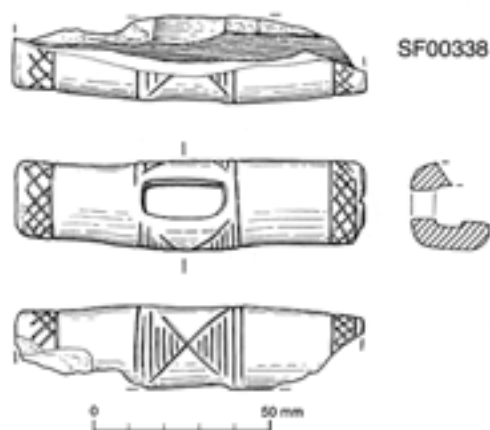
Pins of bone and other materials such as jet or non-ferrous metal were used by women in the Roman period to arrange their hair: SF268, is a very plain example, with a slightly swollen shank below the simple reel-shaped head. This pin design conforms to Type 6 as defined by Crummy in her study of the pins from Colchester (Crummy 1983, 24-5). She suggests these pins typically date to the late 3rd to 4th century, although some could be as early as c. 200AD (Crummy 1983, 25). A similar pin was found in excavations of the Friends Burial Ground, Bishophill in York (MacGregor AY17/02, no.161).

A small green cylindrical glass bead (SF363) and a cylindrical fossil, also possibly used as a bead (SF364) were both found in the Phase 5 cremation (context 1022). The same deposit also produced two vessel glass fragments (SF360, SF362) (see below). Green cylindrical beads such as SF363 are very common finds on sites throughout the Roman period (Guido 1978, 208-211).

Another bone object SF338 is of uncertain identification. Now incomplete, it was originally sub-tubular, with a rectangular slot on opposing faces. The object has been decorated with incised designs: each end has a band of cross-hatching and to the side of the surviving slot there is a field with a saltire with infilling lines between arms of the cross. Originally this was similar on the other side but much has been broken away. A possible function of this object is as a sword hilt guard, indicated by the slot that is of a form to take a sword tang (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 266). Bone hilt guards are not common finds from the Roman period - they were perhaps more typically wooden, while handles were often of bone - and few appear to have been decorated, so identification of SF338 as a sword guard has to be tentative. A bone example was, however, recovered in Exeter (Holbrook and Bidwell 1991, 266-7). SF338 was found in a deposit believed to be Phase 4 upcast from nearby graves (context 1114).



Possible sword guard

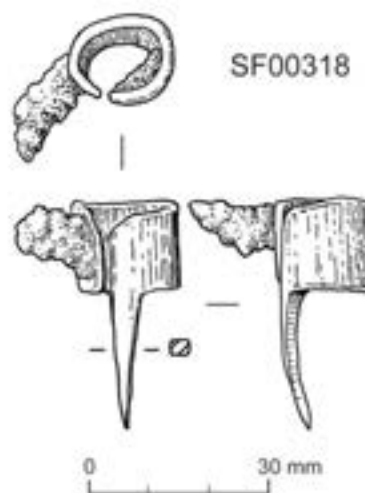


Decorated bone object

SF318 is an iron object found in a Phase 4 grave fill (context 1144). It comprises a penannular band with a projecting spike at the gap in the band: on some sites, these objects have been identified as ox-goads, mounted on the end of a staff and used to control draught oxen (Cool and Philo 1998, 132, no.27, fig.47), but similar objects found in late 1st - mid 2nd century (pre-Hadrianic) levels at the fort of Vindolanda were found alongside writing tablets and have been interpreted as pen nibs, the band fitting onto the end of a wooden shaft (Pearce et al. 2003 - <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/exhibition/docs-2.shtml>). An identical object was found in late 2nd to early 3rd century grave fill at nearby No. 3 Driffield Terrace (YORYM 2004.354 SF49).



Iron pen



Hobnails were recovered from several contexts. SF332, SF334, SF335 contain approximately 80 hobnails all from the same Phase 2 grave (context 1182), and SF296 comprises approximately 90 hobnails found in Phase 4 grave fill (context 1107). Unfortunately, no leather survived, and nailing patterns were not identified, as may be possible at No.3 Driffield Terrace (YORYM 2004.354 SF310). SF232 context 1095 and single hobnails (SF340, SF278) were also recovered from the site.

Several vessel glass fragments were found, but all appear too fragmentary to enable identification of the original vessels. The largest fragment is (SF235), a blue-green base fragment, possibly from a small beaker or bowl. Found in the same deposit as (SF235) (and also the tongs and bone pin - see above) was (SF329), another blue-green base fragment. The two vessel glass fragments, (SF360, SF362) found in the Phase 5 cremation (context 1022), are probably from the same pale blue thin-walled vessel. SF337 is a blue green neck fragment presumably from a jug, flask or bottle, and found in a Phase 5 pit (context 1087).

Burial goods

Burial goods are objects deliberately deposited with bodies (Barber and Bowsler 2000, 117). Often these goods include personal items such as jewellery, pins and glass vessels, all of which were found amongst the graves on this site. But it has not been possible to identify any of these artefacts as goods from the excavated burials, as none can confidently be said to have been located on the bodies. Most of the objects have been recovered from grave fill, upcast soil or mounds over graves, and while it is possible some derive from the excavated burials, others may have been associated with adjacent or earlier disturbed burials, or have been casual losses on the site. Exceptions to this are the hobnails found in two graves, one grave from Phase 2 (context 1182) and one from Phase 4 (context 1107): these nails probably derive from shoes buried with or on bodies.

The bone pin SF268 certainly does not belong to one of the excavated burials, as these pins were worn by women, and none of the excavated bodies has been identified as female (link to human bone report). This suggests that the deposit (context 1095) from which the pin - and also the silver tongs (SF236) - derives must be of a disturbed nature: consequently, it is also not possible to directly relate the tongs to one of the excavated burials. The tongs do hint, however, at a possible military link to the site, for - as noted earlier, see above - similar objects have been found predominantly on military sites elsewhere in northern England. The possible hilt guard SF338 also points to a military connection.



Fragment of a Roman lamp

The only pottery types which might be related to ritual are two incomplete lamps and a few sherds of tazza (incense burners). These forms are, however, also found in household assemblages and may have found their way into the cemetery deposits along with the rest of

the refuse. Equally some of the domestic pottery might have performed a ritual or burial function; this may be the case with some of the fine red samian wares from East and Central Gaul. There is, however, a significant number of amphora and mortaria fragments, together with a range of other cooking and table wares which are likely to represent domestic rather than funerary usage.

There is further evidence that this is a refuse assemblage. The size of sherds are generally very small and very few join each other to reconstruct vessels or vessel profiles.

Many of the sherds are also very abraded, suggesting they have been re-deposited on a number of occasions. This is especially noticeable in the amphora sherds and the Nene Valley coloured coated wares where edges are rounded and much of the surfaces have been lost.

The sequence of burial phases and refuse dumps encountered on the is given some chronological structure by the pottery, although there are few groups to give very precise dating. Most of the pottery is of late 2nd and early 3rd century date, but there are some earlier types amongst the assemblage, including Nene Valley barbotine and rough-cast wares which are likely to be earlier than late 2nd century. Some of the local Ebor ware types might also be very late 1st or early 2nd century.

At the other end of the chronological spectrum, one or two sherds are thought to be later in date than early 3rd century. A fragment of a Castor box from context 1070, for example, and a sherd of Black Burnished ware 2 from context 1091, may be later 3rd century. An unusual shell-tempered sherd from context 1018 is either a late Roman or, just possibly, of Anglo-Saxon date. Another possible Anglo-Saxon sherd was recovered from context 1163, and a sherd with comb decoration from context 1033 may also of this date. Although only represented by a handful of sherds, this wide chronological range suggests that rubbish dumping had occurred on the site for most of the Roman period, and possibly beyond, into the so-called Dark Ages.

5 THE INHUMATIONS FROM 6 DRIFFIELD TERRACE

Katie Tucker

The remains of twenty-four individuals were recovered from the excavations at 6 Driffield Terrace. They are all judged to be males of either the young adult or middle adult age category (19-45 years). There are no sub-adults among the assemblage and no females. There are also no males who fall into the mature adult category (46 years or older). This does not conform to the expected demographic profile for a normal attritional cemetery population, which should have a roughly equal number of males and females, and all age categories represented, with higher numbers of very young and older individuals. A large number appear to have been decapitated (eighteen of the twenty-three individuals show definite or possible evidence). This high proportion of decapitations suggests that this cemetery, or this part of what may be a larger cemetery (see below), is very unusual in nature.

The skeletons were recovered from three phases of activity on the site, Phase 2, Phase 4 and Phase 5. The information given below, is separated into these phases but deals with only twenty-three skeletons as the cranium labelled as SK1 (1029) is now known to be part of SK3 (1030). The information given in the table summarises the data gathered at the initial assessment stage. The group is clearly part of a wider cemetery (similar evidence, including

more examples of decapitations, was recovered only a few metres away on the same street in an earlier excavation). The whole group, together with one or two other skeletons from the same part of York are currently part of a wider research project and full analysis of all the relevant burials will be carried out. The data on the table will be re-evaluated, and updated, and this website will be developed and augmented.

Phase 2

Two skeletons, (Sk 12, 24), were excavated from this phase. One is more than 75% complete and the other is 25-50% complete. They both show excellent bone preservation. Both of them have the necessary elements present to give an estimate of age. One of the individuals is judged to be a young adult (19-25 years) and one a middle adult (26-35 years). Both of the individuals have the necessary elements to provide an indication of sex, and they are both judged to be male. Both of the individuals have surviving dentition, and skulls and long bones that are sufficiently preserved to provide biometric data. Both of the individuals show possible cutmarks that may indicate decapitation.

Phase 4

Thirteen skeletons (Sk 10,11 13-23) were excavated from this phase. Eight are more than 75% complete, one is 50-75% complete, two are 25-50% complete, and two are less than 25% complete. Twelve of the skeletons exhibit excellent bone preservation, while one exhibits good bone preservation. All of the individuals are adult, and 11 of these have the necessary elements present to give an estimate of age. Four of the individuals are judged to be young adult (19-25 years), and seven are judged to be middle adult (26-35 years). Eleven of the individuals have the necessary elements to give an indication of sex, and they are all judged to be male. Nine of the individuals have surviving dentition and skulls that are sufficiently well preserved to provide biometric data, while 12 have long bones that are also sufficiently well preserved. Five individuals exhibit cut marks to their cervical vertebrae, indicating decapitation, while another two show possible cut marks, and a further one has displacement of the skull, but no surviving osteological evidence for decapitation. Other pathological observations were non-specific infections, cysts, unhealed cranial trauma, and possible tuberculosis.

Phase 5

Eight skeletons (SK 1/3, 2, 4-9) were excavated from this phase. Four are more than 75% complete, two are 50-75% complete, and two are 25-50% complete. All of the skeletons exhibit excellent bone preservation. All of the individuals are adult, and seven of these have the necessary elements present to give an estimate of age. One of the individuals is judged to be young adult (19-25 years), and six are judged to be middle adult (26-35 years). All of the individuals have the necessary elements to give an indication of sex, and they are all judged to be male. Seven of the individuals have surviving dentition and skulls that are sufficiently well preserved to provide biometric data, while all eight have long bones that are also sufficiently well preserved. Four individuals exhibit cut marks to their cervical vertebrae, indicating decapitation, while another four have displacement of the skull, but no surviving osteological evidence for decapitation.

Table of the Inhumations

Context No.	SK No.	Phase	Completeness	Preservation	Age	Sex	Decapitation	Pathology
1029	1	5	<25%	excellent	Adult	?M	-	Cribriform orbitalia, supernumerary tooth NB is part of SK3
1030	2	5	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1025	3	5	>75%	excellent	Young adult	M	Yes	-
1009	4	5	50-75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1038, 1205	5	5	25-50%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1035	6	5	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1041	7	5	50-75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1044	8	5	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	Caries
1055	9	5	25-50%	excellent	Adult	M	Yes	-
1075	10	4	<25%	excellent	Young adult	-	Possible	-
1079	11	4	<25%	excellent	Adult	-	-	-
1083	12	2	25-50%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Possible	-
1086	13	4	25-50%	excellent	Middle adult	M	-	-
1105, 1209, 1216	14	4	>75%	excellent	Adult	M	Possible	-
1112	15	4	>75%	good	Young adult	M	No	Non-specific infection
1120, 1206	16	4	25-50%	excellent	Middle adult	M	-	-
1121, 1207, 1210	17	4	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	Cranial trauma
1123, 1214	18	4	>75%	excellent	Young adult	M	No	-
1124	19	4	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	Cysts and new bone on pelvis
1125, 1212	20	4	50-75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1126	21	4	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	-
1129	22	4	>75%	excellent	Middle adult	M	Yes	Possible tuberculosis
1175, 1202	23	4	>75%	excellent	Young adult	M	Yes	-
1187	24	2	>75%	excellent	Young adult	M	possible	Spina bifida

Discussion

Decapitated skeletons have been found in other cemeteries from Roman Britain, including other cemeteries in York. They are, however, usually only a very small percentage of the total number of burials, with males and females being roughly equally singled out for such treatment.

There have been many different interpretations for decapitation burials, although the majority of such burials from Roman Britain are now interpreted as being the result of some form of burial practice carried out after death, with the heads removed by careful cutting from the front of the neck; possibly to prevent the dead from returning to haunt the living (Harman et al 1981; Philpott 1991). The burials from 6 Driffield Terrace, however, as well as those previously found in York, do not seem to fit the pattern seen for other decapitation burials. The all-male composition of the cemetery, the large numbers of decapitations, and the less precise nature of the cutmarks (with the majority of the cuts being made to the back of the neck), may suggest some form of execution, or ritualised killing of the individuals concerned. The fact that decapitated skeletons are to be found in different phases of the cemetery indicates that this was not a single mass event, but occurred over a number of years. There is a lot more work to be done on these and other decapitated skeletons before a more definite answer as to why their heads were removed can be found.

6 THE ANIMAL BONE

By John Carrott, Deborah Jacques, Juliet Mant and Stewart Gardner

Methods

The data were entered directly into a series of tables using a purpose built input system and *Paradox* software. Subjective records were made concerning the state of preservation, colour of the fragments and appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Additionally, notes were made concerning fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breakage.

Where possible, fragments were identified to species or species group using the PRS modern comparative reference collection. Fragments that could not be identified to species were described as the 'unidentified' fraction. Within this fraction, fragments were grouped into a number of categories: large mammal (assumed to be cattle, horse or large cervid), medium-sized mammal (assumed to be caprovid, pig or small cervid) and totally unidentified. These categories are represented by 'unidentified' in [Table 1](#).

Results

Deposits at 6 Driffield Terrace produced an assemblage of bone totalling 1549 fragments. Of these fragments, 41 were measurable and 12 were mandibles with teeth *in situ*, of use for providing biometrical and age-at-death data. The fifty-six deposits from which the assemblage was recovered were mainly associated with the Roman cemetery and represented deposition layers or the fills of graves. There was also some bone from several pit fills of a slightly earlier date and a small number of deposits dated to the medieval and modern periods. Vertebrate remains from the backfill of a pit excavated during a previous archaeological intervention and material that was designated unstratified are shown in [Table 1](#) but not discussed in the text.

Material from the pit fills was generally well preserved, with little evidence of dog gnawing or burning. A small number of fragments showed butchery damage, whilst many had been damaged more recently by fresh breakage. Remains recovered from deposits associated with the cemetery (including grave fills) were of reasonable preservation, although some variation was noted in material from Contexts 1026, 1109, 1111, 1114 and 1148 and poorly preserved fragments were noted in Contexts 1109 and 1111. This material also appeared to have suffered more dog gnawing damage, although evidence of burning and butchery was still limited.

Human bones were noted from 13 contexts but seven of these were grave fills (Contexts 1020, 1026, 1033, 1040, 1054, 1107 and 1144) and thus the presence of these fragments was not unexpected. The other deposits with human remains were two cemetery deposits (Contexts 1031 and 1114), pit fills (Contexts 1048, 1087 and 1093) and a medieval plough soil (Context 1018). In these cases, the human remains are likely to be indicators of redeposited or residual material.

Remains of horse dominated the assemblage, although many of the fragments belonged to several possible part skeletons and were concentrated in a limited number of grave deposits (Contexts 1107, 1144, 1149, 1155 and 1182). However, excluding the material from these deposits, horse was still the most commonly represented species in deposits associated with the cemetery ([Table 1](#)). Other species recovered from the cemetery deposits included cattle, caprovid, pig, dog, chicken and a single fragment of rook or crow. A similar range of domestic

species was recovered from pit deposits and from contexts of medieval or modern date, although horse was not as well represented. Additionally, a single red deer bone (a calcaneum) was identified from Context 1087 (pit fill). A large proportion of the unidentified material represented large mammal fragments associated with the horse skeletons, including pieces of vertebrae and ribs, whilst the remainder of this fraction included fragments of both large and medium-sized mammals.

A number of the horse remains recovered from this site showed evidence of butchery, including a split metatarsal (Context 1048), a scapula with knife marks on the blade (Context 1095), several chopped pelves (Contexts 1095, 1107, 1144 and 1149) and a chopped humerus (Context 1182). Skeletal elements from other species had been butchered in a similar way, for example, a split cattle metacarpal (Context 1026), a chopped pig pelvis (Context 1046) and several chopped cattle limb bones (Contexts 1018, 1048 and 1144).

A brief examination of body part representation indicated that all areas of the body were present for the main domesticates. Both meat-bearing and waste bones were recovered for cattle, sheep/goat and pig, although, generally, mandible fragments and isolated teeth were quite numerous, with the relative numbers of radii and phalanges being high for caprovids and cattle, respectively.

Vertebrate material from Graves 1130 (fill 1107), 1150 (fills 1144 and 1149) and 1183 (fills 1155 and 1182) was interpreted by the excavator as possible grave offerings. Most of the bones from these deposits were identified as horse.

Remains from Context 1107 (the fill of Grave 1130, which included a box containing three human skeletons) included 345 fragments of horse, representing parts of at least four individuals. These included two fragmented skulls (one of which showed evidence of numerous knife marks) and vertebrae from four animals. It was noted during excavation that the bones were mostly disarticulated with the exception of several groups of vertebrae. One almost complete spinal column included three thoracic vertebrae that had become fused together and several more vertebrae that showed evidence of extra bone growth around the centrum. Three other sets of vertebrae all included the distal part of the column, in particular the last few lumbar vertebrae and the sacrum. Pelves were also well represented, with six examples representing at least four individuals, three of which had been butchered. They also showed some evidence of dog gnawing. Other fragments included a humerus, rib and first phalanx, whilst other species were represented by two cattle bones and a fragment of human bone.



Horse bones in fill 1107



Articulated horse vertebrae in fill 1107



Horse bones in fill 1144, Grave 1150

Context 1144 (upper fill of a large pit, 1150, which included a human inhumation) produced 409 fragments of bone, whilst a second fill, Context 1149, yielded a further 15 fragments. Again, most of the bones were identified as horse, however, in this case, limb bones were better represented, particularly femora, tibiae and humeri. Mandibles, radii and pelvis were also present (all three examples of pelvis were butchered) as well as six incisors that probably belonged to a single individual. A number of vertebrae formed an almost complete vertebral column, but because of fresh breakage damage, it was not possible to be completely certain that they represented the same individual. From the tibiae and the femora it was possible to suggest that a minimum number of four individuals were represented in this grave. Additionally, several cattle bones, and single fragments of pig and chicken, together with a human humerus and ulna fragment were recovered from this deposit.

Contexts 1155 and 1182 were deposits within the same grave cut (1183) and also included a number of horse bones. Three horse vertebrae were recorded from Context 1155, whilst Context 1182 included a scapula, humerus (which had been butchered), two radii, an ulna, pelvis, femur, sacrum and vertebra. Material from these deposits was described as well preserved, although small amounts of dog gnawing evidence was noted.

Discussion

The vertebrate assemblage from this site was reasonably well preserved, although fresh breakage damage was quite extensive. Most of the contexts which produced bone were grave fills or cemetery deposits. Bone from the pits was largely from fills of early 3rd century date, with a few fragments of earlier date.

Remains of domestic taxa dominated the assemblage, with horse being the most common. However, many of the horse bones were concentrated in a few grave fills and probably represented part skeletons. A brief examination of the body part representation for other domestic mammals (cattle, caprovid and pig) showed that bones associated with waste from primary butchery and carcass preparation were prevalent. The horse remains included a range of skeletal elements, although the material from the cemetery deposits was mainly mandibles and isolated teeth.

Indications that some of the animal bones may have been residual or redeposited included the presence of occasional fragments of human bone in pit fills and cemetery deposits, the variable preservation noted in some of the assemblages (particularly from grave fills), and by the occurrence of dog gnawing.

However, several deposits contained bones which were thought to be possible grave offerings. The fills of Graves 1130 and 1150 both included remains representing at least four horses (the minimum number of individuals for each deposit was four). Vertebrae and pelvis were particularly well represented in the former, together with some cranium fragments, whilst, in the latter, limb bones were more numerous. These remains showed evidence of butchery, there were possible skinning marks on the skull bones and a number of the pelvis had been chopped, for example. Dog gnawing was noted and was most prevalent on the pelvis, indicating that these bones had been left exposed, at least for a short time, where dogs had access to them.

Whether these horse remains represent ritual offerings or general refuse is difficult to ascertain. The deposits are certainly unusual as, from a preliminary survey of available literature

(e.g. Philpott 1991), horse remains associated with human burials are rare. However, occasional records of single horse bones or teeth in graves have been made, e.g. at Alton, Hampshire (Millett 1987) and Trentholme Drive, York (Wenham 1968). At Alton, a horse skull together with a human cremation was identified from a late 1st/3rd century cemetery site), horses were the most commonly represented species (other than humans) at the site and there were four instances where horse bones were thought to have been associated with human skeletons (Fraser and Ryder 1968). Recent excavations at the adjacent 3 Driffield Terrace, York, also produced a horse leg that was interpreted as having been deliberately placed within a grave (Carrott et al 2005). Burnt horse bone was recovered from deposits at a Romano-British cemetery at Brougham, Cumbria (Cool 2004). Here it was suggested that horses were being burnt on the funeral pyre as offerings.

The horse bones recovered from 6 Driffield Terrace showed evidence of butchery. However, there is little evidence for the consumption of horse meat in the Roman period, either domestically or ritually. The butchery and dog gnawing evidence suggest that the horses were skinned and may have been partly disarticulated before being dumped.

Table 1 Hand Collected vertebrate remains

species		pit	grave	cemetery	med/mod	test pit	u/s	total
<i>Canis f. domestic</i>	dog	-	1	2	-	-	1	4
<i>Equus f. domestic</i>	horse	10	15*	34	4	3	2	68
<i>Sus f. domestic</i>	pig	10	7	6	2	-	-	25
<i>Cervus elaphus L.</i>	red deer	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	cattle	13	18	7	6	1	-	45
caprovid	sheep/goat	7	10	19	3	1	2	42
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i>	chicken	-	2	4	1	-	-	7
<i>Corvus corone L./ Corvus frugilegus L.</i>	rook/crow	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Homo sapiens</i>	human	10	14	4	1	1	-	30
unidentified		110	459	242	73	6	5	895
Total		161	527*	318	90	12	10	1118

* These figures do not include the part skeletons from Contexts 1107 and 1144.

Key: med/mod = medieval/modern; test pit = test pits dug in late 2004 by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd; u/s = unstratified.

Given that most of the pottery was of 'domestic' types and that the vertebrate remains appear to be mostly of primary butchery refuse (from this preliminary examination at least), it is highly likely that much of the animal bone assemblage represents material from earlier deposits that has been disturbed during subsequent grave digging. In particular, rather than the horse bones being grave offerings, they may simply be remains of several (at least four) horses that were disturbed during the digging of Graves 1130 and 1150. As Grave 1130 was dug into Grave 1150, horse remains from Contexts 1107, 1144 and 1149 may all represent the same four horses.

A similar explanation was proposed for the horse ‘burials’ originally thought to be associated with human burials from a Roman cemetery outside an auxiliary fort at Kesteren in the Netherlands. The material was reinterpreted as the remains of animals dumped prior to the area becoming a cemetery, the material being introduced into the graves during grave digging and backfilling (Lauwerier and Hessing 1992). A large number of horse remains recovered from the Roman Eastern cemetery in London were interpreted as being waste that had been ‘casually disposed of’, possibly as a result of ‘fly tipping’ (Barber and Bowsler 2000).

7 CONCLUSIONS

Before the Roman cemetery

Evidence for prehistoric activity on the site is confined to a possible pot sherd from Pit 1189 (Group 2). The presence of late 2nd/early 3rd century pot in the subsoil deposit 1122 indicates that it was still being formed well into the Roman period.

Although the Driffield Terrace site lies within an area of a major Roman cemetery outside the Roman civilian town (*colonia*) there is some evidence that its primary use was not funerary to begin with, as indicated by the pits and gullies in Groups 2-8, and the domestic character of the pottery assemblage. Only one definite burial took place on the site during Phases 2-3 (Groups 1-8), and the first evidence for intensive burial activity does not occur until Phase 4 (Group 12). The purpose of the early cut features is unclear. One possibility is that they represent the establishment of the main Roman road from the south-west (RCHMY1; Road 10). Some features could have been tree boles, representing the clearance of trees from the vicinity of the road, whereas other features may have been dug to extract gravel for the road structure; it is unlikely that they were rubbish pits, as the character of the fills and the absence of artefacts points to deliberate backfilling. Alternatively these features could represent road-side activity after the road had been established. The earlier deposit groups could have involved rubbish dumping, which might explain the domestic element of the pottery assemblage, although the gravelly, humic-free character of the deposits argues against this. Roadside enclosures of mid 2nd century date, pre-dating the use of the area as a cemetery, were found at 35-41 Blossom Street (1989.21 and 1990.21) about 0.5km to the north-east. Groups 1-12 are all dated by pottery to the late 2nd/early 3rd centuries, so the earliest such dated groups (in Phase 2) may well date to the late 2nd century. The earliest undated groups could date to even earlier in the Roman period, perhaps even prior to Roman times.

It had previously been thought that Roman Road 10 lay some 20m north-west of Tadcaster Road, but the cobbles observed at the rear of 7 Driffield Terrace (1981.1031) suggest that the Roman road lay closer to Tadcaster Road. The absence of the road in the trench at 6 Driffield Terrace supports the latter option.

The Cemetery

Although activities other than burial seem to have dominated the earlier groups of Roman activity, Grave 1183, the possible libation Pit 1152/84, and possible ‘empty’ graves indicate that funerary practices were taking place on the site from Group 4 (Phase 2) onwards. Only one grave (1103) was definitely dug in Group 10, but it was a multiple burial, and 5-6 other burials occurred during Groups 2-10. As late 2nd/early 3rd century pottery occurred throughout Groups 1-12, an

early 3rd century date is suggested for the latter part of these groups. However, a later 3rd century date might be more appropriate if the pottery recovered from these groups was residual from earlier rubbish dumping.

The majority of the burials took place during Groups 12-18 (Phases 4-5). The presence of mid and late 3rd century pottery from Group 13 onwards is thought to reflect the earliest date of the later stages of cemetery activity. Indeed, it may be the case that the cemetery remained in use into the 4th century. Changes in burial practices could have restricted the introduction of pottery onto the site during the 4th century, leaving only residual pottery to be re-circulated in the upcast material from new graves. None of the burials contained intact pottery vessels as grave goods.

The only cremation was the latest burial on the site, which supports the evidence from Trentholme Drive (Wenham 1968) and 3 Driffield Terrace that the cremation rite remained in use after the introduction of inhumation burial.

In contrast with the excavation at 3 Driffield Terrace, it was possible to identify the point at which the graves were cut in the majority of cases, and to ascertain that there were many deposits that sealed some burials but were cut by others. It was evident that there were several episodes of grave digging, separated by deposition. There are some indications that burials respected recent or contemporary burials, but the degree of intercutting was sufficient to indicate that the position of some burials had been lost by the time later burials were dug; see the trench section. The cemetery therefore seems to have been in use for a long period of time which, combined with the pottery evidence, suggests that the cemetery was in use throughout the 3rd century, and probably into the 4th century. Medieval ploughing probably truncated the cemetery, but as there were few human bones in the ploughsoil it is possible that only the uppermost deposits were affected, leaving even the latest burials largely intact.

The presence of fine ware pottery, amphorae and the occasional oil lamp and tazza could mean that pottery was being introduced onto the site in connection with ritual feasting and as grave goods. The small mortarium assemblage (15 sherds, about 1.5% of the total), found entirely in later groups, does not suggest there was a major rubbish dump component to the Roman activity; rubbish dumping may have been restricted to Group 3, or was a consistent but minor activity during the use of the site as a cemetery. The larger amphora assemblage (130 sherds) could represent waste disposal, but could equally have been the product of feasting on site.

Some of the animal bone found on the site may have been the result of funerary sacrifice or ritual feasting, although it might not be possible to distinguish such waste from bones dug up from an earlier dumping phase. A few individual bones were found alongside the burials, in such a position that strongly suggests they were deliberately included in the grave. The large quantities of horse bones, found in Graves 1130 and 1150, are particularly noteworthy. A horse skeleton has previously been found within the Roman cemetery close to this site (RCHMY1, 97). The suggestion that the remains were dumped during a pre-cemetery phase, then dug up and deposited in these graves is not supported by the degree of selectivity of bone type that was exercised with these two successive burials. At present the likeliest scenario is that the horses were left skinned but intact in the cemetery, long enough to allow some dog gnawing. The deposition of first limb bones then torso bones in the graves suggests that bone selection was

influenced by accessibility, perhaps due to gradual disarticulation of the remains. It seems that at least four individual horses were skinned and left in a situation that allowed dogs to gnaw at the remains. Subsequently certain bones were placed in Grave 1150, followed by mostly different bones in Grave 1130.

There were several post-holes, which could have held grave markers. The relationship between post-holes and graves is uncertain, except for post-hole 1058, which appears to have been dug to one side of Grave 1056 rather than at one end of the grave (see Roman features: Phase 5).



Mound 1040 over grave 1042

The burials were consistently shallow, mostly around 0.3m deep. One reason for such shallow graves may have been the presence of boulder clay close to the top of the undisturbed natural deposits, which would have been difficult to dig into. However, in Roman law it was only deemed necessary to cover the body with earth, as a basic requirement at least (Hope 2000, 105-6). In one case (1042), the grave was covered by a mound of gravelly material at least 80mm high, which would have provided a greater thickness of deposit over the body, as well as forming a grave marker that would have reduced the risk of inadvertent disturbance by later burials. It is possible that other graves were covered with similar mounds that settled and spread out over time, to the point that they were scarcely visible.



Coffin outline in Grave 1065

Most of the inhumations and the cremation were placed in coffins or boxes, as indicated by the presence of iron nails and/or a coffin infill surrounded by a backfill around the 'coffin'. The distributions of the iron nails suggests that only the lids of some of the coffins were nailed in place, the rest of the coffin presumably being pegged together or jointed.

There was no clear pattern in the alignment of the burials. Although a small majority of burials were parallel or perpendicular to the presumed line of Road 10 (fourteen and one 'empty' grave), a significant minority were not (ten and four 'empty' graves). The most popular orientation was with head to south-east (five) and the least favoured orientation was with head to west or east (See Table 2 below).

The Inhumations

All of the inhumations were buried supine except for Skeleton 22 (1129) which was prone. In terms of the position of the arms, where present, there was no distinct pattern. The most common position was straight by the sides, but there were occasional examples of one arm (sometimes both) across the pelvis or abdomen, or behind the back, or akimbo. The legs were usually straight out, but sometimes flexed or bent to left or right.

Decapitations

The high proportion of decapitated male skeletons in the cemetery (16 out of 18 that could be identified either way) is very significant. It even exceeds the proportion found at 3 Driffield Terrace. Although uncommon, decapitation is not unknown in Roman cemeteries. Philpott (Philpott 1991, 77-89) found evidence for over one hundred examples, but they usually occur in small numbers even in large cemeteries. At Lankhills, Winchester for example, there were seven out of 439 burials. The largest numbers out of reasonably sized cemeteries are fifteen out of 100 or so at Cassington (Oxon.) and twelve out of 122 at Dunstable (Beds.). At Walkington Wold (East Yorks.), 10 of the 12 burials found were decapitated (Bartlett and Mackey 1972, 21); however, the burials post-date 4th century occupation, and the burials have been radiocarbon dated to the Middle Anglo-Saxon period (R. Mackey pers. comm.). Bearing in mind that decapitation was an unusual burial rite and is mostly found in rural contexts, its frequency at the two Driffield Terrace sites is all the more remarkable. It should also be noted that normally males and females appear equally likely to be decapitated, whereas at Driffield Terrace all the bodies were male. All of the burials in Grave 1130 were decapitated, but it seems one of the four in Grave 1103 was not decapitated. This indicates that decapitation was a common but not essential characteristic of this burial population. The alignment of the decapitated burials was similar to those of burials as a whole, with no consistent pattern and no respect to the nearby Roman road.

Table 2a Summary description of definite and possible Roman graves

Grave	Sk	Burial	Fill	Group	Align	Type	Findings	Position	Form	Remarks
1023	1	1029	1022	18		cranium only		disturbed	In cremation 1022	derived from Sk3?
1021	2	1030	1020	18	ssw/nne	Decap	nails, sheep	supine	coffin	
1027	3	1025	1026	18	nnw/sse	Decap	Nails	supine	coffin, shrouded?	cranium is Sk1?
1028	4	1009	1008	18	se/nw	Decap	Nails	supine	coffin	
1039	5	1038, 1205	1037, 1203	18	se/nw	decap?	nails	supine	coffin?	
1036	6	1035	1034	14-16	nnw/sse	decap	nails	supine	coffin	damaged by TP3
1042	7	1041	1040, 1043	16	ssw/nne	decap	nails	supine	coffin?	
1065	8	1044	1033, 1069	16	Wnw/ese	decap	nails	supine	coffin	
1056	9	1055	1052	16	se/nw	decap	nails	supine	coffin	
1047	10	1075	1046	14	nw/se	decap	nails	supine	coffin	with Sk10
1047	11	1079	1046	14	se/nw	decap?	nails	supine?	coffin	with Sk11
1085	12	1083	1084	4-12	ne/sw	decap?	Nail	supine	coffin?	
1063	13	1086	1062	14	se/nw	decap?		supine		
1103	14	1105, 1209	1104	2-10	s/n	decap?	nails	supine	coffin	with Sk17,18,20
1128	15	1112	1111	12	nw/se		nails	supine	coffin	
1118	16	1120, 1206	1119, 1204	2-12	n/s	decap?		supine		
1103	17	1121, 1210	1104	2-10	s/n	decap?	nails	supine	coffin	with Sk14,18,20
1103	18	1123, 1214	1104	2-10	n/s		nails	supine	coffin	with Sk14,17,20
1130	19	1124	1107, 1135	12	ne/sw		nails, horse	supine	coffin	with Sk14,17,18
1103	20	1125, 1212	1104	2-10	s/n	decap?	nails	supine	coffin	with Sk14,17,18
1130	21	1126	1107, 1135	12	sw/ne	Decap	nails, horse	supine	coffin	with Sk19,22
1130	22	1129	1107, 1135	12	ne/sw	Decap	nails, horse	prone	coffin	with Sk19,21
1150	23	1175, 1202	1144, 1201	10	nnw/sse	decap?	nails?, horse	supine	coffin?	damaged by TP4
1183	24	1187	1182	4	sse/nnw		Hob-nails			
1023		1022	1022	18		cremation	Box	frags	box	damaged by TP3?
1060			1059	16	(e-w)	Empty				
1071			1069	14	(e-w)	Empty				
1100			1101	16	(nw-se)	Empty				
1134			1133	12	(e-w)	Empty				
1181			1180	4	(n-s)	Empty				

CAP = correct anatomical position

Table 2b Summary description of definite and possible Roman graves

Sk or grave	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Head	Left Arm	Right Arm	Legs
1							
2	1.68	0.64	0.34	right of pelvis	disturbed	straight	left over right
3	2.08	0.75	0.3	between femora	straight	across abdomen	straight
4	1.2 min	0.6	0.24	on knees	straight	straight	straight
5	0.98 min	0.27 min	0.18	absent	absent	straight	absent
6	1.8	0.64	0.21	on left shoulder	straight	across abdomen	straight
7	1.34 min	0.7	0.26	between knees	straight	straight	left over right
8	1.68	0.68	0.3	next to feet	straight	across abdomen	right over left
9	1.26 min	0.62	0.24	between femora	absent	straight	straight
10	1.85 min	0.4 min	0.3	absent	across abdomen	absent	absent
11	1.85 min	0.4 min	0.3	absent	absent	absent	absent
12	0.36 min	0.5 min	0.12	on shoulders	straight	straight	absent
13	0.92 min	0.32 min	0.13	absent	behind back	across abdomen	absent
14	1.32 min	0.57	0.27	absent	absent	absent	straight
15	1.62	0.64	0.22	CAP	straight	straight	flexed to sw
16	0.85 min	0.8 min	0.12	absent	straight	absent	absent
17	1.32 min	0.57	0.27	absent	absent	hand over pelvis	straight
18	1.32 min	0.57	0.27	CAP	straight	straight	absent
19	1.62 min	0.84	0.31	CAP	behind back	over leg of Sk21	straight
20	1.32 min	0.57	0.27	absent	absent	absent	straight
21	1.62 min	0.84	0.31	right of torso	straight	behind back	right flexed outwards
22	1.62 min	0.84	0.31	left of torso	flexed akimbo	straight	straight
23	2.3 min	1.9 min	0.4	absent	across abdomen	across abdomen	flexed to sw
24	1.86	0.6	0.52	CAP	across abdomen	across abdomen	straight
1023	1.1 min	0.48	0.2				
1060	1.28	0.26	0.22				
1071	1.7	0.68	0.4				
1100	0.7 min	0.57 min	0.14				
1134	1.1 min	0.54	0.24				
1181	0.75 min	0.7	0.25				

Decapitations probably occur on the site from the early 3rd century, which reflects the date given to the decapitations from 3 Driffield Terrace. However the decapitations appear to continue into the 4th century at 6 Driffield Terrace. This prolonged use of decapitation may also be reflected in the apparent increase in the rite over time, to perhaps 100% by Phase 5. The burial of all the later decapitations in coffins at No. 6, in contrast with the lack of decapitations

in coffins at No. 3, could also point to a difference in date for the two populations. It is therefore possible that the decapitations at York were early examples of a rite that became more widespread across Britain in the 4th-5th centuries.

In the case of Driffield Terrace the site is so topographically prominent - lying close to the main approach road from the south-west and on a local high point - that one would have thought that people buried here had an elevated status rather than the opposite. Furthermore, the apparent placement of the decapitated burials in coffins at 6 Driffield Terrace points to burials carried out with a degree of care and respect, although the only prone burial was decapitated. Although some of the decapitations to the back of the neck were clearly visible on the bones, other skulls had been removed at the cervical vertebra by a sharp implement so that the decapitation could not be identified osteologically (see The inhumations).

The significance of the decapitation rite is still not clear. Philpott (Philpott 1991, 83f.) rehearses some of the more common interpretations including that which would see decapitation as a mark of disrespect reserved for deviants, criminals and the like. However, decapitation of corpses for such purposes was carried out in order to destroy the identity of the deceased; the head was normally not buried with the rest of the body and was often put on display (Hope 2000, 114). Moreover, it seems that decapitation as a form of execution was restricted to citizens (Hope 2000, 112).

Another possibility is that these were gladiator burials. Losing gladiators who failed in their appeal for mercy were generally dispatched by a knife or sword thrust through the back of the neck, severing the spinal column. Contemporary writers suggest that lifeless fighters brought to the corpse processing room (spoliarium) routinely had their throats cut for good measure (Seneca, Letters 19.12), and that some victims had their throats cut in the arena as an entertainment in its own right (Seneca, Epistles 7). The other documented method of dispatch was for apparently lifeless combatants in the arena, who were hit on the head with a hammer by a slave dressed as Charon to make absolutely certain (Zoll 2002, 164). The average age at death for gladiators based on the evidence from tombstones was 27, but as many younger, less successful fighters would have died uncommemorated it is likely that the actual age at death was somewhat lower (Wisdom 2001, 59). These demographic features are reflected in the burial population at 6 Driffield Terrace. A comparison of documented 1st and 3rd century gladiator duels found that whereas only 19 of 200 combatants (less than 10%) died in the 1st century, by the 3rd century the death rate was 25% (Wisdom 2001, 59). As the numbers of fighters participating in shows increased during the Roman period, it seems the number of fatalities grew steadily. The bodies, already regarded as 'unclean' by the Romans, would have had additional social stigma as gladiators. They may well have been buried in designated areas by their comrades, perhaps with the help of burial clubs (Zoll 2002, 212).

Another possible reason for decapitating the body is that the skull may have been regarded as the seat of the soul. Decapitation might have been intended to prevent the ghost of the deceased rising to haunt the living, or it may have been thought that the skull had powers that could be invested in other objects or monuments (Ross 1971, 7). It has been suggested that post-mortem decapitation may have been a pagan rite, perhaps a deliberate attempt to confound the Christian notion that the body should be left as intact as possible for the Resurrection (Petts 2003, 149). The placing of a skull (1029), within the box containing

Cremation 1022 implies a degree of respect for the skull, as it would have been easier to leave the skull out of the box (assuming the box had to be opened to put the skull in). If the skull had been recovered accidentally, it had not simply been discarded. Perhaps the skull elevated the status of the cremation. The decapitated burials at Walkington Wold were situated on a Bronze Age barrow (Bartlett and Mackey 1972). A tumulus, shown on the ridge of high ground to the north-west of Driffield Terrace on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map, could have been a barrow, and it is possible that the decapitations were placed with a degree of respect to the barrow. Alternatively, a nearby Roman burial could have attracted the decapitations. One possible candidate is Grave 1150, an unusual burial with horse bones that was followed by the first decapitated burials in another unusual grave with horse bones (1130). These burials may have been marked out by a low mound (1095), which appears to have been respected by subsequent decapitated burials (Roman features: Phase 5).

Containers and grave goods

The presence of iron nails around the periphery of the cut suggests a wooden coffin in at least 12 of the graves. Many nails were found in the upper part of the fill, indicating that the nails may have been used primarily to fix the lid to a coffin otherwise held together by joints or pegs.

Grave furnishings were rare. Hobnails signify the presence of pairs of boots or shoes in Graves 1107 and 1183. Finds of hobnailed shoes are common in Roman Britain with a particular concentration in the south-west (Philpott 1991, 167), and there are other examples from York, for example in the 4th century cemetery at 16-22 Coppergate. The silver miniature tongs (SF236) were very probably derived from a burial, but were found in a cemetery deposit and were presumably disturbed by a later burial. Other artefacts found in cemetery layers could have originated in earlier burials, or perhaps in dumps that preceded the cemetery.

Grave-like features

In addition to the inhumation graves described above, there were five features which had the appearance of graves in size and shape, but contained no human remains. They may have originally contained bodies that completely decayed due to the acidic sandy subsoil. Alternatively, the bones had been deliberately removed or disturbed. Similar features were recorded at 1-3 Driffield Terrace and 35-41 Blossom Street.

The Cremation

The single cremation (1022) comprised a deposit of charcoal and burnt bone. The rectangular shape of the deposit and the presence of iron nails on the edge of the cut indicated that the cremation material had been moved from the original pyre position and buried in a wooden box. An unburnt, intact skull (1029; Skeleton 1), found within the cremation deposit, appears to have been disturbed from 1025 (Skeleton 3). This appears to have been either respectful burial of an inadvertently disturbed body or the deliberate disturbance of the body in order to bury the skull with the cremation.

Structures

There were several shallow gullies and post-holes that may have formed parts of more than one cemetery structure, notably in Group 8. However the form and extent of such structures is

difficult to determine from such a small excavation. A gully with associated post-holes, apparently delimiting a gravelled area, was identified at 1-3 Driffield Terrace (Ottaway 2005, 24-5).

Post-Roman activity

The site was used for arable farming during the medieval period if not earlier. The uppermost inhumations were slightly disturbed by ploughing. Evidence for the appearance of housing alongside The Mount during the 19th century is restricted to a garden soil and some probable planting pits.

Conclusion

The Roman cemetery at 6 Driffield Terrace is notable chiefly for the extremely high proportion of decapitations. Other aspects, such as other forms of perimortem trauma, multiple burials, the animal bone deposits and the unusual gender composition makes it all the more remarkable. The contrast with other cemeteries in Roman Britain is stark, and demonstrates that Roman burial practices and perhaps methods of execution are still not well understood.

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