

Christchurch(X17), Dorset: The cremated human bone

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None of the cremations examined contained any evidence for the presence of more than one individual. None of them were complete - an adult skeleton that has been burnt will weigh around 2 kg.

The individuals represented by 785386, 785389 and 785593 were all adult. The remainder were probably adult (no unfused epiphyses were noted) but were so fragmentary that it is impossible to state categorically that they were adult. 785389 was probably female (a pelvis fragment contained part of a definite pre-auricular sulcus) and fairly young, although adult, as no degenerative arthritic changes were noted in the vertebrae.

The parts of the body recognised in the fragments are listed below and the weights of bone preserved are given in the table.

785386	Skull (including maxilla, sphenoid, temporal and occipital bones), femur, tibia, fibula, humerus, vertebrae, ribs, phalanges, pelvis, scapula and patella.
785387	Very tiny fragments (average size under 5 mm) including skull, rib, long bones, extremities and a tooth root.
785388	Long bones, ribs and skull including vault and a mandibular condyle.
785389	Skull (including sphenoid, occipital and parietal bones), long bones, vertebrae, phalanges, pelvis and ribs. Maximum size was about 5 cm but average size only about 1 cm.
785390	Probably not cremated this was probably human and possibly a fragment of jaw.
785391	Skull, ribs and long bones.
785593	Skull (including sphenoid, mandible and wormian bones), femur, humerus, ribs, vertebrae and pelvis.

It can be seen from the table that long bones and skull tend to be over-represented relative to their proportion in a complete skeleton. This is to be expected as they are the most robust and easily recognised parts of the skeleton and so tend to remain in larger pieces and are most readily identified. The high proportion of skull in 785389 may represent deliberate selection by the depositors of the cremation or may just be a reflection of the relatively small size of the deposit.

I would like to thank Guy Grainger for examining the two large cremations (785386 and 785593) for me.

Table: The weights of the cremations

A.M. Lab. No.	Long bones	Skull	Ribs	Vertebrae	Pelvis	Hands/Feet	Patella	Totals Identified	Unident.	Grand Total
785386	414 (57)	161 (22)	65 (9)	70 (10)	5(1)	6(1)	3	724	165	889
785387								0	181	181
785388	28 (78)	5 (14)	3 (8)					36	0	36
785389	57 (46)	54 (44)		4 (3)	7 (6)	1 (1)		123	102	225
785390 (not cremated)								0	1	1
785391	13 (52)	9 (36)	3 (12)					25	0	25
785593	212 (60)	64 (18)	39 (11)	20 (6)	17 (5)			352	317	669
Unburnt skeleton	(40)	(20)	(8)	(11)	(7)	(9)	(1)			

Notes - All weights are in grams.

The figures in brackets are percentages with respect to the identified total for that cremation.

The unburnt skeleton percentage figures are given for comparison only.