SITE 51

Report 4464

A Note on Some Human Bone from Kings Langley, Herts.

Ancient Monuments Lab.
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A quantity of inhumed human bone from this site was examined in the Laboratory and it was found that there were a minimum number of five individuals present. The material was generally in good condition but disturbance of the bones in the ground had led to confusion such that only one skeleton could be described as being relatively complete and with the exception of a juvenile it was not possible to assign any of the remaining bones to any particular individual. Observations were made for sex, age and stature and any dental or bone pathology that was present. Details of the results by individual are given in the attached catalogue together with the methods used in the analysis (for a fuller description of the methods see Henderson (1984)).

This sample was found to include the skeletal remains of four adults and one juvenile individual. One of the adults was probably male but for the remaining three there was a greater degree of uncertainty and they could only be described as "possibly male". No attempt was made to sex the juvenile. All of the adults were young and it was possible to suggest age estimates of 17-23 years for one and 20-25 years for a further two. The juvenile had an age estimate of 10-15 years. Stature could be estimated on the most complete adult individual only (Individual 1: 1.79m, approximately 5'10.5"). There was little evidence for the health of these individuals with the most common pathological finding being one of dental disease. It was also noted that there was spondylolysis present on the fourth lumbar vertebra of Individual 1.

There was a small amount of animal bone present. This was identified by Beverley Meddens (Ancient Monuments Laboratory) and is listed at the end of the catalogue.

Catalogue of the Human Bone from Kings Langley, Herts.

Individual 1

Bone condition: Nearly complete skeleton in good condition.
Sex: Male, assessed on pelvic and skull morphology and measurements of the femora, humeri, scapulae and talii and calcaneii.
Age: 17-23 years, assessed on metamorphosis of the pubic symphysis and epiphyseal union.
Stature: 1.79m ±.0299. c.5'10.5". Femoral and tibial long long bone lengths were used.
Pathology:
Dental: Observations could be made on the maxillary teeth only. There were three carious lesions present, affecting the right second molar, the left second incisor and the left first molar. On the right second molar the lesion was located on the occlusal surface of the tooth. On the remaining two the caries were located distally at the level of the cemento-enamel junction. None of the caries was large. There was also evidence for a moderate degree of periodontal disease, involving bony recession at the alveolar margins. Finally it was interesting to note that there was congenital absence of the left canine, not a tooth which is commonly recorded as absent (Shafer, Hine and Levy 1974).

Skeletal: Spondylolysis was observed to be present at the level of the fourth lumbar vertebra. None of the remaining vertebrae were affected. This condition may be described as a bony defect at the pars interarticularis which results in the posterior part of the vertebral arch (the spine, laminae and inferior articular processes) being united to the rest of the vertebra by hyaline cartilage instead of by bone (Duthie and Bentley 1983). In some cases displacement may occur (spondylolisthesis). However in archaeological examples of this condition it is not generally feasible to determine either the cause of the spondylolysis or any subsequent effects. Certainly in this it was not possible to say whether the condition had been productive of symptoms or not.

Individuals 2-4

A minimum number of three individuals were represented by a mixed assemblage of cranial and post-cranial bones. It was not feasible to sort this material by individual.

Bone condition: Good
Sex: The evidence for sex was extremely ambiguous with none of the bones suggesting a clearcut differentiation by sex. However overall it was concluded that all three individuals should be included as ?Male.
Age: All three could be aged as young adults. In addition the evidence for occlusal wear of the teeth on two of the mandibles suggested age estimates for two individuals of 20-25 years.
Stature: -
Pathology:
Dental: There was some evidence for dental disease on one of the

mandibles only. On this individual there were three carious lesions present: on the right second and third molars and on the left third molar. All of these caries were located on the occlusal surface of the tooth, those on the right second and left third molars being gross in size, whilst that on the right third molar was small. In addition there was an abscess present at the level of the root tip of the right second molar tooth. This may well have been associated with the carious lesion that was present on that tooth. There was no further evidence for oral pathology except for a slight degree of periodontal disease on this mandible.

Skeletal: There was some evidence for sub-periosteal new bone deposits on a tibial shaft fragment. It was not possible to comment further on this other than to include it as an example of non-specific bone infection.

Individual 5

Bone condition: Fair, very incomplete skeleton
Sex: -
Age: Juvenile, assessed on bone size as probably aged 10-15 years.
Stature: -
Pathology: -

The Animal Bones

1) Right tibial fragment from a juvenile pig.
2) Right fourth metatarsal from an adult dog, probably a large breed.
3) Metatarsal shaft fragments from a small red or fallow deer. The fragments probably all came from the same bone.

References Cited in the Text

Duthie R.B. and Bentley G.: Mercer's Orthopaedic Surgery. 8th ed. Edward Arnold, 1983.

Henderson Janet D.: The Human Skeletal Remains - Carlisle, Blackfriars Street. Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report no. 4219 (unpublished). 1984.

Shafer W.G., Hine M.K. and B.M. Levy: A Textbook of Oral Pathology. 3rd ed. W.B. Saunders Co., 1974.

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