

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 70/88

A SKULL AND MANDIBLE FROM ABBEY
MEADS, CHERTSEY, SURREY.

Janet D Henderson MA Hons (Cantab)

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Summary

A skull, mandible and some cervical vertebrae were all that remained of this skeleton of Bronze Age date. The remains were adult, possibly male. Other evidence centred on dental disease and the possibility of evidence for decapitation- of which there was none.

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A Skull and Mandible from Abbey Meads, Chertsey, Surrey

A skull, mandible and fragments of a minimum of five cervical vertebrae were all that remained of this individual. All were in a fragmentary condition although there was little damage to the actual bone surfaces. Observations were attempted for age, sex, stature, metrics, morphology and pathology. A catalogue of the methods used in the analysis and the results obtained is attached.

On the basis of the robustness of the fragments and the measurements of the mandible this individual was tentatively identified as a male. There could not be a more conclusive attribution of sex as only the skull and mandible could be assessed and the reliability of sexing on these bones is limited. The material clearly came from an adult and the degree of wear on the occlusal surfaces of the teeth suggested middle-age (35-45 years approximately). It was not possible to make an estimate of stature.

Only the mandible could be measured and examined for morphological traits (tables of these may be found in the catalogue). No findings of any particular note were made.

Evidence for pathological change was noted on the teeth alone. As noted in estimating age there was a moderate degree of occlusal surface wear. There were carious lesions affecting the first right maxillary and mandibular molars but no evidence for abscesses. In the case of the first right mandibular molar this was perhaps surprising given the size of the caries but it was noted that the sockets were not very well preserved which is possibly why no lesions were visible. There was moderate bony recession at the alveolar margins and fairly marked deposits of calculus around the mandibular incisors, both of which might indicate some degree of gingivitis (gum disease) during life. Finally it was noted that there was crowding of the anterior mandibular teeth, in particular of the right canine which was slanted forward across the lateral incisor, and that there was congenital absence of the left mandibular third molar.

The apparent finding of a skull and mandible alone led to a number of queries with respect to the burial (whether any neck bones were present, whether there were any evidence for deliberate detachment from the body etc.). As fragments of a minimum of five cervical vertebrae could be identified it was clear that both head and neck had been present. Fragments of the atlas and axis could be identified but whether the remainder represented C3-5 or C4-6 or C5-7 or some other combination could not be ascertained although the likeliest grouping, as C1 and C2 were there, would be C3-5. There was no evidence on any of these bones for deliberate decapitation but given their fragmentary nature this cannot be regarded as conclusive. Thus this could have been either deliberate burial of a head and neck alone or alternatively it might represent the remains of a disturbed burial.

Human Bone Catalogue

S1

A skull, mandible and five cervical vertebrae only in fragmentary condition.

Sex: ?Male, based on the general robustness of the cranial fragments and discriminant function analysis of the mandible (Giles 1970).

Age: 35-45 years, based on dental wear (Brothwell 1981).

Dental Pathology

Note: Teeth are listed according to the F.D.I. system (see, for example, Downer (1975))

Wear: Fairly marked with coalition of exposed islands of dentin

Caries: 1,6 mesial surface, located at the level of the cemento-enamel junction, medium size

4,6 gross lesion affecting both crown and root

Abscess: No evidence for abscess or cyst

Periodontal Disease: Moderate recession of the alveolar margins.

Calculus: Some large deposits on the anterior mandibular teeth (incisors) on the crowns at the level of the cemento-enamel junction. Suggested lost post-mortem elsewhere.

Crowding: Some crowding of the anterior mandibular teeth (3+4, 1-2, 4,3). In particular 4,3 is slanted across the anterior surface of 4,2.

Absence: 3,8 (information for the mandible only).

Bibliography

Brothwell D.R.: Digging Up Bones.

British Museum (Natural History). 3rd ed. 1981.

Downer G.C.: Dental Morphology: An Illustrated Guide

John Wright and Sons Ltd., Bristol. 1975.

Giles E.: Discriminant function sexing of the human skeleton. In: Stewart

T.D.(ed.): Personal Identification in Mass Disasters, p.99-

109. Washington, National Museum of Natural History. 1970.

Mandible Metrics

Number	H1	ML	GoGo	W1	CrH Right/Left	CyL Right/Left	RB' Right/Left	ZZ	M2H Right/Left	M2B Right/Left
S1	35	97	93	116	- 63	22 22	27 27	42	- 29	12 13

Index of Abbreviations

Note: All measurements are given in millimetres (mm)

H1: Symphyseal height
ML: Condyle-symphyseal length
GoGo: Bigonial diameter
W1: Bicondylar width
CrH: Height of ascending ramus
RB': Minimum ramus breadth
M1/2: Body height at M1/2
M2: Body thickness at M2

Mandible Morphology

Number	1	2	3
	R/L	R/L	R/L
S1	0/1	0/0	1/1

Index of Abbreviations

R = Right

L = Left

The following are scored on an absent (0), present (1) basis, except where otherwise stated.

1. Mylo-hyoid groove (1 = partial bridge, 2 = complete bridge)
2. Mandibular Torus
3. Gonial Eversion (1...x denotes increasing severity)