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THE CREMATED BONE FROM SHORTHEATH LANE, SULHAMSTEAD ABBOTTS, BERKSHIRE.

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Summary

Seven samples of cremated bone of Bronze Age date were examined. Five of these were identified as burnt and human. Owing to poor preservation and small sample size very few observations could be made.

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The Cremated Bone from Shortheath Lane, Sulhamstead Abbotts

Seven samples from in and around urns were examined. One (Context 12) contained residue only, one might or might not have been human (Context 43) and the remainder were a group of small collections of cremated human bone. All were poorly preserved and present in very small quantity. Observations were attempted for bone identification, sex, age and details of cremation practice but very few could actually be made. A catalogue of the results obtained for each sample is attached.

The results for sex, age and sample weight are given in Table 1 (below). As can be seen in the table very little information could be recorded for this group. A 'minimum number of individuals' estimate was not considered justifiable on the available samples.

Table 1. Cremated Bone: Results for Sex, Age and Sample Weight

Sample No.	Sex	Age (in years)	Sample Weight (in grams)
Note: Sample numbers are given by context and finds number, eg. Context 37, S.F. 41 is listed as 37/41.			
15	-	-	4.5
37/41	-	Adult	745
38/59	-	Adult	450
43/42	-	-	14.5
44/51	-	Adult	37
12	Not a sample of burnt human bone		
/60	-	Adult	107.5
/72	-	Adult	800

Details of the bones present, the colour and size of the bone fragments may yield information concerning cremation practice. With this group it should be noted that there were only two samples of sufficient weight for assessment (Context 37 and S.F. 72) and therefore any comments apply to them alone, not to the whole sample.

In both cases insufficient bone could be identified for a categorical statement to be made to the effect that 'elements of all parts of the skeleton were found'. Thus there were no indications of discrimination (in favour of the skull for example). Most of the fragments were white in colour with some pieces of blue-grey. This suggested that the cremations had been fairly complete but it did not show whether this was because the technique had been very efficient (and therefore quick) or simply that the pyre had been allowed to burn for a long time.

Human Bone Catalogue

Context 15

A small sample (9 fragments) of burnt human bone. No further comment possible.
Weight: 4.5 g

Context 37, S.F. 41

A small sample of burnt human bone. Very few bones could be identified. No evidence for more than one individual.
Fragments identified: Skull, tooth, vertebra, rib, innominate, femur, long bone, phalanges (hands).
Age: Adult, based on a sutural fragment (skull)
Degree of Burning: Colour varied from white to blue-grey. The material was well broken up.
Weight: 745 g

Context 38, S.F. 59

A small sample of burnt human bone. Very few bones could be identified. No evidence for more than one individual.
Fragments identified: Skull, tooth, mandible, vertebra (axis and thoracic body), rib, innominate, femur, long bone, phalanges (hands).
Age: Adult, based on tooth fragments
Degree of Burning: Colour was mostly white. The material was well broken up.
Weight: 450 g

Context 43, S.F. 42

A very small sample of burnt bone. This was probably of human origin although it could not be conclusively identified as such. No further comment possible.
Weight: 14.5 g

Context 44, S.F. 51

A very small sample of burnt human bone. A tooth fragment and the odontoid process of the axis vertebra could be identified.
Age: Adult, based on the tooth and vertebral fragments
Weight: 37 g

Context 12

A small bag of soil residue.

S.F. 60

A very small sample of burnt human bone. A tooth root fragment only could be identified.
Age: Adult, based on the tooth fragment
Weight: 107.5 g

S.F. 72

A small sample of burnt human bone. Very few bones could be identified. No evidence for more than one individual.
Fragments identified: Skull, tooth, vertebra (includes odontoid process of axis), rib, innominate, radius, ulna, long bone, phalanges (hands).
Age: Adult, based on bone extremities and the tooth fragment
Degree of Burning: Colour mostly white. The material was well broken up.
Weight: 800 g