

SECTION 1

The Cemeteries: Description and Evaluation

The seven cemetery sites to be considered in this thesis are all located in the North-East of England, and range in period from early Saxon to late medieval. All have been analysed (either fully or in part) by the present writer. The sites are as follows:-

a) *The Hirsell*, Coldstream: Excavated by Professor R.J. Cramp, Durham University, 1979-84. This ecclesiastical site has been dated to the 9th-late 14th centuries, starting with a small chapel. The church was extended in the 10th and 12th centuries, and some of the burials to the west of the church were cut by the extended west end. Four burials seen by the present writer have been dated, two at the west end (Sk. 247, c.1205 ± 100 a.d.; Sk. 239, 1245 ± 55 a.d.), one at the east end (Sk. 26, 1200 ± 125 a.d.), and one just to the north of the last (Sk. 14, 1365 ± 60 a.d.). In addition two of the skeletons excavated in the first year were dated, but not analysed (Sk.1, c.1210; Sk. 3, 1110 ± 20 a.d.) The span of use of the cemetery was probably 11th-13th century, with a few burials from the early 17th century.

Little is known from textual evidence, but it is assumed that the skeletal population from The Hirsell represent a fairly static rural community. The people were likely to have been of British stock, but since the site is just within the territory of Lindisfarne it is possible that there were some Anglo-Saxons. On the whole, however, the population is thought to be native, and probably had little admixture from the Iron Age to the Medieval period. A large proportion of child burials were recovered from this site. The minimum number of individuals was estimated at 334.

b) *Jarrow*, Tyne and Wear: Excavated by Professor R.J. Cramp, Durham University, 1963-75 (Cramp, 1969). The building of the monastery at Jarrow was started in 682. There is evidence from Bede for c.600 brethren at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth combined by the year 716. After the Viking attacks on the Northumbrian coast in the 9th century, the site was abandoned for a time, but was revived in 1072 and became a dependent cell of Durham in 1083. At the Dissolution the church remained in use. The Pre-conquest cemetery was situated at the south-west of the church, and the medieval cemetery was to the west of this. Burial continued in the churchyard into post-medieval times (18th century).

The Jarrow skeletons have been divided into three groups by broad time period as follows: "Preconquest-Early Medieval" (or Saxon), incorporating all those skeletons believed to be of Saxon or earlier date, with a few which may possibly extend into the early part of the medieval period; "Medieval", incorporating all those skeletons dated between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, i.e. early medieval proper, medieval and late medieval; and "Post-Medieval", including those few skeletons thought to be of 17th century date or later. The post-medieval skeletons will not be considered in the present study since there were so few of them.

Both Jarrow and Monkwearmouth were likely to have had fluctuations of population. The foundation of Saxon monasteries suggests the appearance of a small elitist group, and monks taking over a populated area with tenants and rents. At both sites there is a possibility of burials earlier than the foundation dates of the monasteries. Between the 7th and 9th centuries the monasteries served as foci for the surrounding population. There is however a problem in that there is no clearly defined division of lay and religious burial in either cemetery, either temporally or spatially. There are distinct groups but it is not always possible to take these into account, due to the difficulty in distinguishing them and the resulting reduced size of the skeletal sample. Both sites were open to raids and violence since they were situated on the coast. The estimated minimum number of individuals from the sample analysed was 380, although the actual number of burials excavated was nearly double this figure. Many of the skeletons were analysed by Dr. Calvin Wells, but the site was not completed before his death. Any skeletons which he did not see, and which had not been reburied (a total of c.98 individuals), were analysed by Anderson and Birkett (1988).

c) *Monkwearmouth*, Tyne and Wear: Excavated by Professor R.J. Cramp, Durham University, 1961-74 (Cramp, 1969; 1976). The history of this monastic site is closely tied up with its sister foundation at Jarrow. Building of the monastery began in 674, and like Jarrow the site was abandoned in the 9th century, revived in 1072, and later became a small cell of Durham. There was an extensive Christian cemetery to the south of the west porch, which probably remained in use up to the 12th century. The earliest burials may predate the church of 674. Many of the skeletons were disturbed by later burials and building, and this made the estimation of a minimum number of individuals very difficult. A figure of c.200-230 was eventually arrived at. Many of the skeletons from this site also were studied by Wells, and the remainder were seen by Anderson and Birkett (Wells, 1988?; Wells *et al*, forthcoming).

d) *Norton*, Cleveland: Excavated by Cleveland County Archaeology Unit, 1984. The discovery of a 6th century Pagan burial in 1982 resulted in the survey and subsequent excavation of a cemetery containing 120 burials (117 inhumations and 3 cremations). The site was broadly dated to 540-610, from the large and rich assemblage of grave goods. The cemetery was situated on the sand and gravel terrace on the north edge of the Tees estuary. There are no other known pagan Anglo-Saxon remains in Norton parish, and no other known sites of the period in Cleveland north of the Tees. The human remains were analysed by Anderson and Marlow (Marlow, forthcoming). The estimated minimum number of individuals was 126.

e) *Blackfriars*, Newcastle: Excavated by R. Fraser, Newcastle Archaeology Unit, 1983-86. The excavation of this medieval friary was carried out under rescue conditions, and many of the interments identified had to remain unexcavated. A total of 36 individuals were recovered from both the cemetery to the north of the church and from within the church itself, 29 being from the chancel. There was also a large amount of redeposited bone. The method of excavation may account for any sample bias, such as the small number of juvenile skeletons recovered. The skeletons were analysed by Anderson (forthcoming).

f) *Blackgate*, Newcastle: Excavated by B. Harbottle, Newcastle Archaeology Unit, 1977-8. This cemetery site was situated at the base of the castle mound in Newcastle. The few related finds dated the start of the cemetery to c.700A.D. Most burials were sealed below the clay of the castle rampart of 1080, although a few were dated to the late 11th century or later. The cemetery was probably closed in 1168. Only bones appearing to be in situ and with some signs of articulation were kept. The interments were all very disturbed, due to the digging of new graves and the castle ditch, 17th-19th century occupation, houses, shops, etc. and the construction of the railway viaduct in the mid 19th century. Orientation was approximately W-E, and the lack of grave goods was evidence for the Christian nature of the site. The other half of this cemetery population, from around the base of the castle mound, is awaiting analysis. The estimated minimum number of individuals from the first part was 140.

g) *Guisborough Priory*, Cleveland: Excavated by D. Heslop, Cleveland County Archaeology Unit, 1985-86. Excavations were carried out within the church of this Augustinian Priory, and 47 skeletons were recovered. The priory dates from the 12th to 16th centuries and was dissolved in 1540.

All the sites except two (*Norton* and *Blackgate*) were associated with an ecclesiastical building, and all the burials were inhumations (with the exception of three cremations from *Norton*). All are within the ancient kingdom of Northumbria, although the cemeteries at *Blackfriars* and *Guisborough* did not exist at the time of this political division.

Details for each site are summarized in Table 1.1 below.

Site	Abbrev.	Date Range	Type	MNI
The Hirsell	HIR	11th-13th c.	Church	334
Jarrow	JA	Sax-16th c.	Monastic	380
Monkwearmouth	MK	Saxon	Monastic	200
Norton	NEM	c.540-610	Pagan	126
Blackfriars	BF	Medieval	Monastic	36
Blackgate	BG	c.700-1168	Christian?	140
Guisborough	GP	12th-14th c.	Monastic	47

Table 1.1.

On average, preservation of skeletal remains at all the sites was fair, although it is possible to grade them from best to worst as follows: GP, BF, HIR, BG, JA, MK, NEM. It is unfortunate, but not uncommon, that the larger populations are generally the worst preserved.