

SECTION 7.

Short note on the Pathological Study

The study of pathological conditions in human skeletal remains is an enormous and specialised field, and I have not attempted to discuss pathological cases in this work. Most cases of interest from all of the sites considered here have either already been published (Wells, 1974a, 1974c, 1976d, 1977a, 1979; Wells & Woodhouse, 1975), or will be in the near future (Anderson and Birkett/ Anderson, forthcoming), and the details of these will not be repeated here.

Unlike previous chapters, there will be no attempt to study general papers on the subject, since the enormous number of papers on the subject of palaeopathology make this all but impossible within the scope of the present work.

It was intended that prevalences of the more common diseases at each site would be given, but this has proved impossible for Jarrow, Monkwearmouth, The Hirsell and Norton, since the present writer was only superficially involved with the pathological study of these. In the case of Jarrow, Monkwearmouth and The Hirsell the pathological reports are in the process of completion by Dr. Birkett. Some information can be obtained from Wells' studies of Jarrow and Monkwearmouth, and Birkett's analysis of the Norton skeletons, but this is not always comparable with the data recorded from the sites whose pathology was studied by the present writer (Blackfriars, Blackgate and Guisborough).

In every case, analysis of the skeletal remains from the seven sites considered here was carried out for the purpose of writing short reports. No time or resources were available for the detailed examination of every bone and joint for signs of diseases such as osteoarthritis. Histological, microscopic and radiographic techniques could be used in very few cases. Only macroscopic analysis was possible for the majority of the remains, and descriptions of probable and possible pathological changes are noted in the catalogues.

In view of this, it was decided that it was best not to attempt a prevalence study of diseases in the three groups studied by the writer, since these are at best small and at worst disordered. It is felt that a patchy survey of a few diseases at a few of the sites could not hope to be as detailed as the anthropological study of these cemeteries, nor would it provide a great deal of information in the scope of a comparative work. It is to be hoped that in the future there may be the resources available for a detailed pathological prevalence study of a large site such as The Hirsell, in a field such as rheumatology.

In the meantime, all that can be said about the pathology of these groups is that there were very few examples of serious bone disease, that degenerative disease was common at all sites in the older age groups (as might be expected), that examples of trauma and/or weapon injury were noted at nearly every site, and that non-specific infections were noted fairly regularly. Greater detail can be found in the relevant reports.

