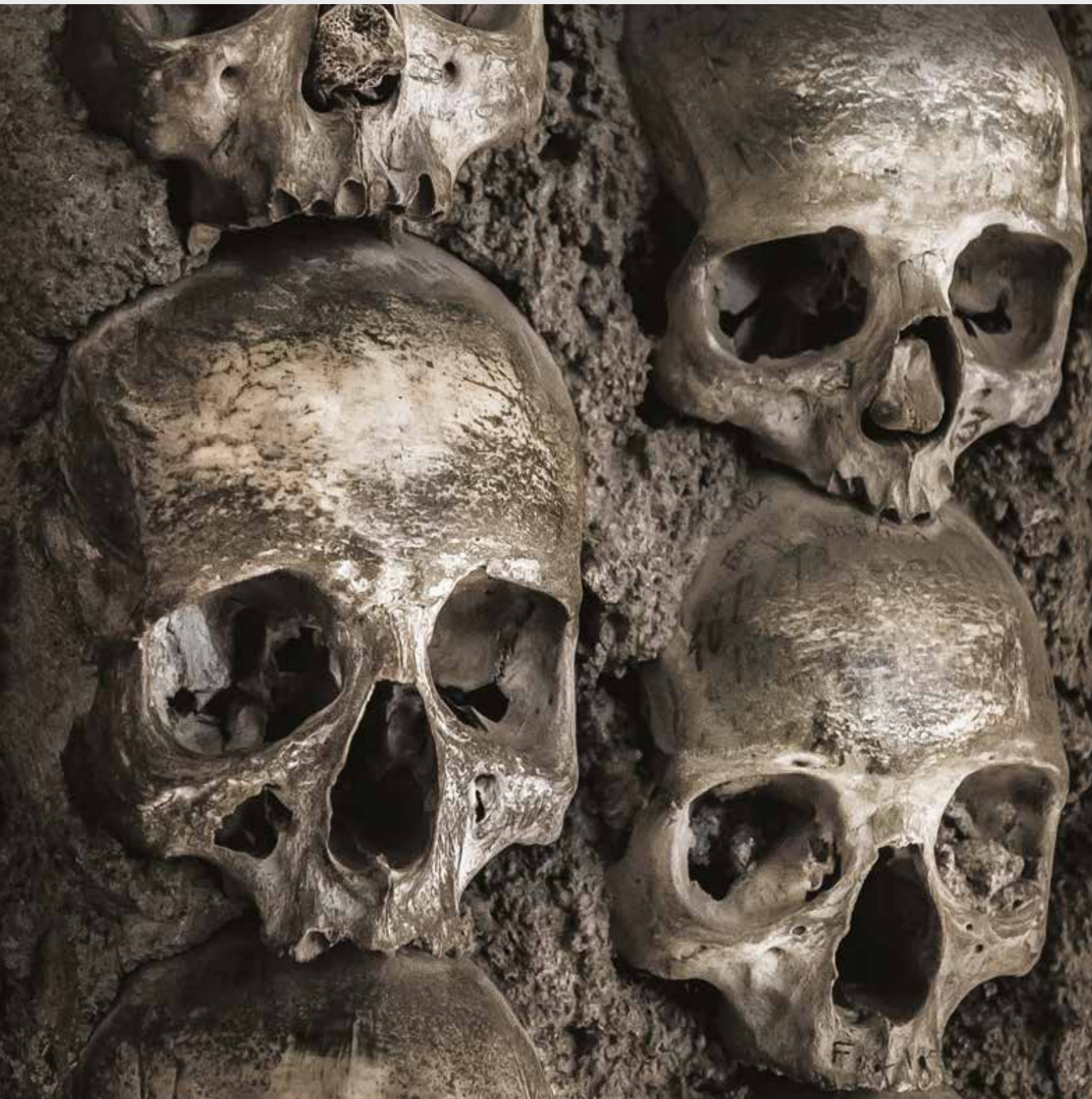


**RememberMe**

**DEEP IN TIME:  
MEANING AND MNEMONIC IN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES OF DEATH**

**YVONNE INALL AND MALCOLM LILLIE**



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**Remember Me: The Changing Face of Memorialisation**  
**Deep in Time: meaning and mnemonic in archaeological**  
**studies of death.**

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<sup>1</sup> Deceased 28.8.2017

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## Research Highlights

- Across time the core function of memorialisation processes highlights a perpetual need to maintain an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.
- There is considerable evidence, particularly in later periods that the forms and representations of memorials and memorialisation rituals mirror past practices.
- The dead may be transformed through memorialisation processes to reflect the cosmological beliefs of the society.
- Throughout time significant shifts are evident in the ways that society assisted the deceased on their journeys into the afterlife.
- For those whose deaths may have been problematic, ritual processes, showing similar features over time, were enacted to ameliorate troubled spirits and mitigate perceived supernatural dangers to the living.
- Treatment of the physical body was an important part of the memorialisation process, the deceased being treated with intimate care in every historical period.
- Liminal constructs, the spatial patterning, and the meaning of deathscapes varied over time depending on the nature of the relationships between the living and the dead.
- The dead often continue to have active social lives in the community of the living through the creation of memorials and the preservation and curation of remains: although throughout all periods there are modes of disposal that result in an 'invisible dead'.
- Funerary goods, rites and memorials evidence the movement of peoples in complex processes of adaptation and integration between established and incoming cultures.
- While memorialisation practices may change, the concerns they seek to address reverberate across time.

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# Executive Summary

## 1. Background and Rationale

The Deep Time component of the Remember Me project seeks to identify broad trends and themes in memorialisation processes from the Iron Age (beginning c.800BC) through to AD 1640 as a means of informing understanding of the processes and significance of changing memorial practices in contemporary society. Across this span of time there has been an ongoing need to engage with and memorialise the dead. Recurrent themes emerge, and memorialisation practices of the past continue to resonate in the present.

Despite the focus of this study on the more recent prehistoric through to historical periods, section 2.1 provides an overview of deeper time perspectives, as far back as *ca.* 50,000 years ago, and earlier, in order to encompass the *longue durée* of societal approaches to the dying and the dead. This approach will offer contemporary society a basis from which to re-imagine modern approaches to each of these processes. Recent studies, e.g. Croucher (2017a and b) have demonstrated the ways in which an imaginative use of modern approaches can inform the past, and vice versa.

## 2. Method

Due to the extended time-scale involved in the Deep in Time study a decision was taken to focus primarily on the major funerary and memorialisation practices in each of the following, main chronological periods:

- Iron Age
- Romano-British
- Anglo-Saxon
- Medieval
- Reformation and post-Reformation to AD 1640

An expanded literature search was conducted using academic search engines, key reference works and targeted searches of the main archaeological journals for each period for key words related to death, mortuary treatments and memorialisation practices. Analysis included a particular focus on key sites in each period, for which abundant literature was available.

## 3. Iron Age

A number of burial practices were identified for the Iron Age period in Britain. However, there are significant knowledge gaps for much of Britain and many mortuary practices are largely invisible in the archaeological record. Those practices which are observed in the archaeological record have a strong regional focus, including the Arras Culture square-barrow cemeteries of East Yorkshire, the Durotrigian inhumation rite, centred on the Dorset coast, and cremation burials in the south east of Britain. The Arras Culture barrow burials and the cremation burials of southeast Britain demonstrate connections to Continental Europe. In addition to these practices, the deposition of fragmentary human remains within settlement contexts was a mortuary treatment with a wide geographic distribution that covered much of Britain.

#### **4. Romano-British**

The arrival of Roman colonists during the first century AD resulted in changes in burial and memorialisation practices. Burial practices become visible in the archaeological record across a far greater number of sites during the Romano-British Period. Early Romano-British burials were cremations. These rites were largely indistinguishable from Late Iron Age British cremation burials and few such burials have been recorded from sites beyond the southeast. By the fourth century AD extended, supine inhumation had replaced cremation as the standard burial practice across the Roman Empire, including Roman Britain, as Christian rituals came to the fore. Burials were extramural, and concentrated on urbanised settlements and sites associated with the Roman military. Gravestones appear in Britain for the first time during the Romano-British period, highlighting family and other social connections, and these often offer poignant expressions of grief. However, as an intrusive burial culture, the burial practices which came to the fore during the Roman period did not endure, with the British population reverting to practices which were again largely invisible in the archaeological record after the departure of the Romans.

#### **5. Anglo-Saxon**

From the fifth to the seventh centuries AD Britain experienced an influx of migrants from Germanic Europe. The cultural impact of this movement of people was significant, and included changes in mortuary and memorialisation practices. Cremation was reintroduced to Britain, often practiced alongside inhumation. Anglo-Saxon burials during this period strongly referenced the past, re-using, incorporating and emulating Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British monuments. The wealth of some of these burials speak to the use of memorialisation strategies to reinforce social roles.

By the ninth century, much of Britain had converted to Christianity, and ancestral monuments took on negative associations with paganism and damnation. These monuments were increasingly utilised as execution cemeteries, inverting their social ranking from the elite to the outcast.

#### **6. Medieval**

By the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 burial rites and memorialisation practices were broadly similar to those observed on the Continent. Extended, supine burial was common practice throughout the medieval period. However, there were significant changes in memorialisation strategies, particularly for the social elite. With the papal recognition of Purgatory in the thirteenth century, there was increasing investment in memorialisation. Chantry monuments and bequests, funerary gifts and liturgical endowments led to a profusion of monuments in diverse forms. The need to be remembered was pervasive, and led to a professionalisation of memorialisation.

#### **7. Reformation and post-Reformation to AD 1640**

The appetite for costly chantry memorials appears to have been declining by the early sixteenth century. The onset of the English Reformation from 1534 hastened the decline and the Act of 1547 enforced a ban and confiscation of chantries. Emerging theological debates about the relationship between the body and the resurrection fundamentally altered the relationship between the living and the dead. The impact of these changes was most visible among the social elite, with a decline in the

number of physical memorials erected, and a change in the language of memorialisation, focussed increasingly on remembering pious lives and avoiding calls for intercession.

## 8. Recurrent themes across time

Across time memorialisation processes demonstrate a need to maintain an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. The dead may be transformed through memorialisation processes, and the strategies employed reflect the cosmological beliefs of the memorialising society.

**Treatment of the physical body** was an important part of the memorialisation process, with the corpse being treated with intimate care in every period. Evidence for careful preparation and dress in the Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods allow us to infer that the deceased were the focus of a period of display prior to the performance of funerary rites. Archival records for the Medieval and early modern periods demonstrate a continued focus on the physical body. Processions also played a significant role in funerals in all periods, with details of the performative aspects preserved in historical accounts of the Romano-British and medieval periods.

The concept of a **journey to an afterlife** is evidenced through the provision of grave goods: food and drink in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Footwear and coins aided Roman Britons in their journey, and Anglo-Saxons were provisioned with grave goods symbolising travel by horse or boat. For the medieval dead the journey was spiritual rather than physical, and the proliferation of chantry services and monuments aided the souls of the departed on their way.

**The dead continued to have active social lives.** The dead were reincorporated into the community through the deposition of fragmentary remains in the Iron Age (and earlier periods), the construction of extramural monuments in the Romano-British period, the curation of cremation urns during the Anglo-Saxon period (an activity which also occurs in modern Britain) and the intrusive displays of chantry monuments of the medieval period. In each period, the living and the dead continued to interact on a daily basis, forming strong mnemonic ties, carefully curating and renegotiating the memory of the departed.

For **those whose deaths may have been problematic** ritual processes were enacted to ameliorate troubled spirits and mitigate perceived supernatural dangers to the living. Deviant burials of the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon period included prone and decapitated burials. Criminals and outcasts of the Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval world were excluded from Christian burials. In the early modern period, murderers were eligible for the post-mortem violation of anatomical dissection.

**Cemeteries and deathscapes** were recursive, often drawing upon, elaborating and sometimes emulating monuments of the deep past. Iron Age monuments frequently built upon Neolithic and Bronze Age legacies and were in turn built upon by Romano-British and, later, Anglo-Saxon monuments. The rise of the Christian church in the Late Anglo-Saxon period changed the focus of mnemonic power away from the pagan past to the new centres of Christian authority.

**Population movements/migration** influenced funerary rites and memorialisation strategies through time. It is apparent that the relationship between movement of people and practices is reflexive and complex. For instance, Romano-British burials included indigenous people buried as 'migrants' as well



as non-locals buried in accordance with local tradition. Anglo-Saxon elites brought their burial rites with them, but these were quickly adapted to incorporate existing monuments into new memorialisation strategies. Subsequently, medieval memorialisation highlights the significance of the deceased both in their immediate context, and in international socio-political networks.

Our study demonstrates that the concerns of the past reverberate through time and remain constant. The ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, between performance, place and the construction of memory all feature strongly in past and present memorialisation strategies.



## 1. Introduction

The Deep Time study focusses on an examination of burial and memorialisation practices in Britain from the Iron Age through to the Early Modern period, coming to a close in AD1640, shortly before the English Civil War. This extended span of time crosses three millennia and tracks a number of distinct cultural phases from the Iron Age interactions between indigenous and continental tribal groups; the conquest by, and collapse of, Rome; the Anglo-Saxon and other migrations, accompanied by the rise of Christianity; the Norman Conquest; Medieval Britain; and the English Reformation.

The Iron Age commences with funerary practices which are largely invisible in the archaeological record. Those practices which are visible demonstrate considerable diversity, and distinct cultural influences. There is a marked increase in archaeologically observable burial and memorialisation practices for the Romano-British period, and Christianity is introduced, following which, previous indigenous mortuary practices appear to have been resurgent. The Anglo-Saxon period ushered in new and diverse burial practices, which are very visible in the archaeological record. During the Late Anglo-Saxon period Christianity again comes to the fore and Christian burial practice became standard from the ninth century AD onwards. Within Christian funerary rites, new modes of practice and mediums for memorialisation developed. At the close of the study period, the Reformation saw a marked secularisation of burial practices, which continued into the Early Modern period.

## 2. Method

The Deep in Time study incorporated a literature review of mortuary and memorialisation practices in the UK from prehistory through to AD 1640. This entailed an extensive archaeo-historical examination of approaches to death, dying, memorials and memorialisation, which was undertaken to generate insights into the ways in which human groups have negotiated and re-negotiated their socio-political and ritualised articulations with the deceased (Binski 1996), the afterlife, and memorialisation practices over time (Sutton 2008). Where additional detail is needed the survey includes examples from Europe and further afield, and incorporates anthropological examples to support interpretations; this is because the “myriad variable forms in which they (burials) occur”, i.e. “the diversity of cultural reaction” (Chapman and Randsborg 1981:1) means that no single explanation is valid across time.

Primarily, the work has been guided by the focus of the AHRC funded Remember Me project on three overarching research questions that, firstly, considered the significance of memorials and memorialisation processes throughout history, their relative significance at different points in time and the ways in which these inform the contextualisation and interpretation of contemporary practice. The second research aim was to develop an understanding of past purposes and meanings in relation to memorials and memorialisation by interpreting the factors and contexts that shape these, and by evaluating their social effects, with a view to developing an holistic understanding of current contexts. Finally, the study investigated the forms and representations of memorials over time in order to determine how and why these may be changing in contemporary society.

Due to the vast time-scale involved in the Deep in Time study a decision was taken to focus on the major funerary and memorialisation practices in each of the major chronological periods:

- Iron Age
- Romano-British
- Anglo-Saxon
- Medieval
- Reformation and post-Reformation to AD 1640

Literature searches were conducted in key journals for each of the target periods. Keyword searches were conducted in academic and archaeological databases, including Google Scholar, Academia.edu, Research Gate, the Archaeology Data Service, and academic journal publisher databases including JStor, Taylor and Francis and Elsevier as well as Web of Science. Where possible, the research drilled down to primary sources in the form of excavation reports and epigraphic (written) records, however, some of the grey literature and older excavation reports were not accessible. Certain areas of the study were informed by the authors' existing research into burial across the Mesolithic through to Iron Age periods in both Europe and the UK, and by on-going teaching that looks at approaches to the study of burial contexts, theory and social praxis from earlier prehistory through to the Medieval period in the UK.

For the searches, the keywords used included: funerary practice, night funeral, burial archaeology, burial practices, inhumation, cremation, memorialisation, embalming practices, shroud, deathscape/funerary landscape, barrow cemetery, disarticulated human remains, deviant burial, prone burial, execution, leprosaria, sarcophagus, mausoleum, gravestone, grave stone, grave marker, standing cross, memorial/memorialisation, memory, chantry, heart burial, migration, isotope analysis, aDNA analysis.

The search resulted in the identification of a library of 416 sources including, peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, site reports, grey literature and direct correspondence with archaeologists. Of these sources, 182 are directly referenced in this report, with the broader literature contributing to discrete reports on each of the focus periods, as well as informing reading and critical, contextual analysis.

In scope, the study presents a chronological overview of a range memorialisation practices over the *longue durée*, from *ca.* 50,000 years ago until the recent historical period (AD1640), following the sequence of events that occur when the individual is in the last stages of life, through the various rituals that accompany burial and beyond. As indicated above, this approach was adopted in order to emphasise that very few contemporary approaches to death and memorialisation can be considered unique to the modern period. In reality though, since the development of cognition (*sensu* Mithen 1998), humans often feel the need to mark the passing of an individual in a manner that is considered appropriate and acceptable, both for the living and for the dead (Robb 2009).

The treatment of the dead person, and the various rituals and ceremonies that accompany this, are enacted in order to ensure that continuing bonds are created, and that the dead are placated (Binford 1971, p. 6, Binski 1996, p.10). Whilst there are variations across time, as society develops and as different cultures choose to enact differing forms of memorialisation practices, the fundamental

purpose of these rituals remains constant. They actively represent relations between the living and the dead, and providing a framework of mnemonic triggers for the living whilst marking the journey of the deceased individual to a perceived afterlife (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, p. 4).

## 2.1 Deep Time Perspectives

Across time, humans have felt the need to mark the passing of an individual through various key stages of life, and ultimately, death (*cf.* Van Gennep, 1960) through a series of ceremonies and rituals that mark these ‘rites of passage’. In all cases though, obviously, any investigation of the rituals surrounding the death of an individual in society requires consideration of the specific cultural context within which these rituals are performed (Binski 1996, Parker Pearson 1999, Weekes 2002, Brück 2017). Whilst death is often viewed as a transition from the living corporeal state to a different phase of existence (Metcalf and Huntington 1991), the ways in which different societies deal with death can differ markedly. For example, Hertz’s (1907) work on Indonesia, with its emphasis on Borneo, Binski (1996) on Medieval death, or Parker Pearson’s recent (2017) consideration of the unburied dead) all highlights the specificities of context, and demonstrate that various cultural, socio-political or ritual considerations influence the treatment of the dead. In addition, of course, we also need to consider the fact that the process of dying can take some time, and it is clear that not all of the various rites that are enacted across the period of dying, death itself, and the time after death, are visible archaeologically (Robb 2013, p. 451).

In earlier archaeological studies processual archaeologists used quantitative methods, such as “age, sex, orientation, grave goods, burial location and degree of body articulation” to infer structure, i.e. the bio-cultural approach, which places a reliance on ethnography in interpretation (Chapman 2013, p. 50). The forms and expression in death and burial, and the symbolic and ritual actions that accompany these, have produced a considerable physical (archaeological and historical) record. In terms of the latter Deetz and Dethlefsen’s (1971) historical study of colonial gravestones in New England utilised information on factors such as “status, community intermarriage, the social implications of stylistic evolution and...the...relative importance of community as opposed to familial control of interment practices” (*ibid.* p. 30, see also Tarlow 1999 and Chapman 2013, p. 50). They used these to infer the economic, ritual, demographic and social aspects that influenced changing styles in mortuary art (which comprised death’s head, cherub, urn and willow and portrait art). The changes recorded over time highlight the changing social attitudes to dying, death and the dead themselves in New England. As noted by Chapman (2013) these approaches were very much *of their time* within the processual archaeology of the 1960’s and 1970’s, but they were part of the stimulus towards a more comprehensive, archaeo-historical, study of death.

Importantly, when studying death, we need to be mindful of the fact that the dead have agency (Williams 2004a, Robb 2009, 2010), necessitating a response, often socially prescribed, aimed at ensuring that the dead are disposed of in a socially acceptable manner. Within this sphere of socially mediated action, it is increasingly apparent that the treatment of the body has been an intimate and mnemonic experience over a long period; with formal burial in evidence from the Palaeolithic period onwards throughout Europe (Pettitt, 2011). However, significant ‘gaps’ do occur in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age periods in Britain (e.g. McKinley 2017, Brück 1995, 2017), and in all periods variations

in burial practices, alongside a range of other factors (e.g. the chemical composition of soils, burial with or without a coffin etc.), results in an 'invisible dead'. For instance, across the Neolithic period in Britain the shift from disarticulation to cremation in a range of depositional contexts has probably biased against the accurate recording of cremations and the numbers of individuals represented by cremation deposits (e.g. Jay and Scarre 2017, p.21).

Additionally, it is important to note that funerary caching<sup>1</sup> has been suggested for pre-Neanderthal archaic humans from as early as perhaps a half a million years ago (Pettitt, 2011, p. 57), but, significantly, formal burial itself is of a much more recent date. Pettitt (2011, p. 59-72) has suggested that the Near Eastern cave burials at Mugharet-es-Skhul (10 individuals) and Qafzeh (13 individuals) constitute formal burials, with these being dated to ca. 130-30,000 years ago. In terms of our understanding of the reasons behind the development of formal burial practices Mithen (1998) has suggested that by 60,000-30,000 years ago the architecture of the human brain had evolved to the point where the various cognitive domains are integrated, resulting in new forms of social activity. Pettitt's (2011) work might suggest that these changes are occurring from an earlier date (in the case of *Homo sapiens sapiens*), as in this context the suggestion is that cognition itself may have "unique functional and dynamic characteristics" linked to the external environment. This is an important observation, as if this is indeed the case, then cognition must be fundamental to the belief that the dead have agency, and that death itself is not necessarily an end point in existence. The fact that cognition is both "historical and heterogeneous and [as such] must ...be analysed diachronically and differentially" (Sutton 2008, p. 37) has resonance as, from this point onwards, humans exhibit cognitive fluidity, and it is from this time that we see humans marking death with a range of formal burial rituals.

Linking back to the development of cognition and the move towards formal burial, research by Rendu et al. (2014) has indicated that Neanderthal remains, discovered in 1908 in a sub-rectangular pit at the cave site of the Bouffia Bonneval, at La Chappelle-aux-Saints, strongly suggests that intentional burial was being undertaken in Western Europe at ca. 70-50,000 years ago. This would suggest that Neanderthals exhibited one of the main characteristics that is considered to be "key evidence of behavioural modernity" (Rendu et al., 2014, p. 81). As such, intentional burial and the complex symbolic behaviour that accompanies it is clearly also linked to Upper Pleistocene (Middle Palaeolithic) humans other than anatomically modern humans (AMHs).

Pettitt (2011, pp. 79–80) had previously argued that not only was there evidence for deliberate burial of *some* Neanderthals, but that in reality there is also evidence for a considerable degree of variability in the mortuary practices of this human group. As this observation is supported by Rendu et al.'s work, it is clear that even at this early stage, the emotional reaction to death elicits a societal response for Neanderthals as well as AMHs. Parker Pearson (2017, p. 132) has suggested that, "if there was a time by which humans had developed a concept of the afterlife, then the early part of the Upper Palaeolithic is that moment, when abstract and imaginative thought developed through a wide range of material and creative activities from the decoration of cave walls to the production of mobiliary

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<sup>1</sup>Funerary caching – the deliberate placement of the deceased individual in a natural feature/context such as a depression or hollow, erosional channel or an alcove in a cave etc. without artificial modification of the feature/context. Formal burial involves the creation or artificial modification of a feature for use in burial (see Pettitt 2011:76-77).

art". However, even at this early date, as noted by Huntington and Metcalf (1979, p. 24), "we can assume neither the universality of particular modes of feeling, nor that similar signs of emotion correspond to the same underlying sentiments in different cultures".

The first known Mid Upper Palaeolithic *Homo sapiens* burial in Britain was excavated in 1823 at Goat's Hole Cave, Paviland, on the Gower Peninsula in Wales (and this is in fact one of the first recorded excavations of an archaeological and palaeontological cave (Pettitt 2011, p. 139)). The individual found at Paviland Cave is Gravettian in date, at between *ca.* 34,050-33,260calBP (Jacobi & Higham 2008). The burial was sprinkled with ochre, which led to the burial being called 'The Red Lady of Paviland' by the geologist William Buckland (Pettitt, 2011, p. 139), although it should be noted that this individual is in fact an anatomically modern human male.

The significance of the 'Red Lady' is that he is similar to a number of other locations in Palaeolithic Europe, e.g. Sungir (Figure 1) and Kostenki in Russia (Alekseeva and Bader, 2000; Bader & Mikhajlova, 1998; Kuzmin et al., 2004), Dolní Věstonice in Moravia, Czech Republic (Formicola *et al.*, 2001) and Grimaldi in Italy (Pettitt 2011, p. 139-214). At these locations, the dead were adorned with rich personal ornamentation. Based on the associated ornaments it has been suggested that the social status of the individual may well have influenced the treatment of the corpse during the funerary rituals (Pettitt, 2011 p. 212), and Sungir and Paviland are amongst the earliest of these dated burials.

At this early date, however, 'social status' should not necessarily be taken to suggest status in terms of vertical ranking (or marked social stratification) in society. It is probably more likely that these early groups were ranked horizontally, and that the treatment of the individual in death highlighted culturally accepted social approaches to the disposal of the dead, even if some form of ascribed status was being articulated through the burial rituals (Chapman 2013). Caution again needs to be exercised in that the reasons behind forms of mortuary custom and beliefs are numerous and complex (Binford 1971, p. 12-15). Fundamentally, whilst there is some similarity in approach to burial ritual and form, as noted in the above quote from Huntington and Metcalf, we cannot assume universality in reactions and responses to death across Europe, even at this early date.

The above observations would suggest that from the earliest times of human burial the dead had agency. It is, therefore, feasible to suggest that even at the beginning of formal human burial, this agency could have included initiators of a chain of action, a spiritual presence, and memory, i.e. three of Robb's (2013:448-9) modes of agency. The fourth, the dead as political catalyst, is perhaps less visible in earlier societies with no clear or overt political structuring, but this does not preclude the use of the dead person by the living to enhance or perpetuate some degree of social 'status'.





Figure 1. Upper Palaeolithic burial of an adult male from Sungir, Russia dated to ca. 38,900-34,500 years ago (Nalawade-Chavan *et al.* 2014).

The above examples are important in highlighting that the Palaeolithic evidence indicates that ritual activity, such as the dressing and preparation of the corpse, the inclusion of grave goods, and sprinkling with ochre, is clearly an embedded part of the mortuary and memorialisation process for human groups from as early as ca. 50,000 years ago. The construction of physical memorials and the selection of special sites for burial (such as Paviland Cave) further demonstrates lasting ties between the living and the dead, whose social lives did not end with their physical demise. From this point onwards, the social relationships between the living and the dead were carefully constructed, negotiated and renegotiated through time, and we need to recognise that the “socio-culturally embedded cognitive life of things” (*cf.* Sutton 2008, p.44) is intrinsically linked to these processes. Furthermore, over the past 11,000 years, cemeteries (defined as discrete areas set aside for the burial of the dead) increasingly become the norm (Meiklejohn *et al.* 2009, Meiklejohn and Babb 2009, also Rugg 2000 for modern definitions of cemeteries). Over time the construction of cemeteries leads to the development of what are effectively landscapes of death (Daniell 1997), and the development of ‘deathscapes’, or palimpsest landscapes. These are seen to be recursive, with the monuments of each period often drawing on the mnemonic potency of earlier sites or monuments, thus, potentially, imbuing the new constructs with ancestral legitimacy.

In the modern context Yarwood *et al.* (2015, p. 172 quote Maddrell and Sidaway 2010, p.4-5) in noting that the term deathscape has been elaborated to:

“invoke both the places associated with death and for the dead, and how these are imbued with meanings and associations: the site of a funeral, and the places of final disposition and of remembrance, and representations of all these. Not only are those places often emotionally fraught, they are frequently the subjects of social contest and power; whilst sometimes being deeply personal, they can also often be places where the personal and public intersect”.

The designation encapsulates the changing nature of death and memorialisation, in that in contemporary society new places and spaces of death and memorialisation, which include roadside memorials, sites of violence, ghost bikes, memorial benches, and on-line memorials (virtual space)

etc., are now incorporated into studies of deathscapes. These spontaneous and informal sites of memorialisation become sacred places through engagement by the bereaved in their “individual and collective negotiations around death, dying, mourning and remembrance” (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010, p. 3). These new sites of memorialisation link back to our earlier observations that emphasise the need to contextualise approaches to dying, death, the dead, memorialisation and remembrance within the socio-political religious and ritual contexts that influenced death and bereavement practices.

### 3. Iron Age Burial Practices

The Iron Age in Britain is conventionally considered to span from *ca.* 800BC to AD43, ending with the Roman conquest (Haselgrove 2009). There are considerable gaps in our knowledge of Iron Age burial practices. The communities of Iron Age Britain were diverse and where burial practices are visible in the archaeological record, they illustrate this diversity (Whimster 1981; Fitzpatrick 1997; Harding 2015). It is clear that, for the majority of the population, inhumation was not practiced (Whimster 1981). Archaeologically invisible rites probably included excarnation or cremation with a dispersal of cremated remains (Haselgrove 2009). In general, the archaeologically visible burial practices have been categorised into broad cultural groups in delimited geographical regions. Despite the excavation of burials datable to the Iron Age, from hundreds of sites across Britain, there has been very little synthesis of research into burial practices. The most notable contribution in this field was Whimster’s (1981) *Burial Practices in Iron Age Britain*, which incorporated data available up until 1979. Since this publication, reports on individual sites, or attempts to explore specific burial practices have appeared, such as Stead’s (1991) publication of Iron Age cemeteries he excavated in East Yorkshire. Harding (2015) has attempted to update Whimster’s work in light of more recent finds, scientific advances in material analyses, and theoretical understanding.

To date a number of distinct mortuary practices have been recorded for Iron Age Britain, these include:

- Arras Culture barrow burial, including satellite burials, ‘speared-corpse’ burials, and ‘chariot’ burials.
- Durotrigian inhumation.
- Cist graves.
- Cremation burials including Aylesford Swarling and Welwyn Culture cremations and Rillington ‘barrowlets’.
- Deposition in settlement contexts including pit burials, fragmentary deposition in enclosure and domestic contexts, and complex depositions of human remains sometimes interpreted as ‘massacres’
- In addition to these were burials or mortuary treatments in unusual or special contexts including rivers, bogs and caves, which have been extensively covered in the literature.

### 3.1 Arras Culture Barrow Burials

One of the earliest Iron Age burial traditions for Britain is represented by the square barrow cemeteries of the Arras Culture (Stead 1979). Named for the type-site of Arras Farm on the Yorkshire Wolds, more than 3,000 Arras Culture burials are recorded from over 100 sites, covering a large area from the River Humber to the North Yorkshire Moors (Stead 1979, 1991; Whimster 1981; Dent 1984; Stoertz 1997; Halkon 2008, 2013). A defining feature of the burial tradition is a rectangular grave, bounded by a square ditch and covered by a low mound. Occasionally, round barrows also appear within these square barrow cemeteries (Stead 1991). The barrows range in size from 3.5m to 15m across, and *ca.* 1.5m high, with bounding ditches between 0.21m to 0.73m deep (Stead 1979). The barrows formed significant monuments to the dead, visible in the landscape until modern times, and they were frequently concentrated on territorial boundaries (Harding 2015). Aspects of this burial tradition bear close similarity to contemporary practice in the Paris Basin, and the question of the extent to which continental practice influenced the local tradition is yet to be definitively resolved (Stead *et al.* 2006; Dent 2010). The Arras tradition probably continued until the first century BC, by which time other burial traditions were emerging in the south, south east and north of Britain (Jay *et al.* 2012).

The barrow cemeteries exhibited their own diversity, ranging in size from individual barrows, to small clusters of burials, to extensive cemeteries with hundreds of barrows, some packed so tightly that they intercut one another (Whimster 1981; Stead 1991; Dent 2010). Greenwell (1906) reported that the cemetery at Danes Graves likely contained over 500 burials, and Stead (1991) and Dent (1984) reported over 200 barrows each at Rudston/Burton Fleming (a single site at the interface between two modern parishes) and Wetwang. Burials within the barrows included crouched, flexed and extended (both supine and prone) inhumations. Barrows often attracted subsequent and later satellite burials, inserted into the mound, in the enclosing ditch, or on shared alignment in close proximity (Dent 1984; Stead 1991).

There seems to have been some variation in the preparation of the corpse for burial. Textiles have been recovered from Arras Culture burials in a range of weaves, indicative of different kinds of cloth (Crowfoot 1991). It appears that some individuals may have been buried fully dressed, perhaps wearing clothing they wore in life (Dent 1984), and the position of brooches over the faces of other individuals suggests the use of shrouds. Dent (1984, 1995) argued that the mode of dressing the dead was indicative of social status, suggesting that the members of the higher social strata were fully clothed, while the lowest strata were buried naked. However, it is possible that organic pins, associated with shrouds, may not have survived in the archaeological record.

Whether shrouds were specifically produced for their funerary function, or whether existing cloth was repurposed is unknown. Ethnographic parallels indicate that great importance could be attached to the production of shrouds, which could be the work of a number of individuals, with decorative elements communicating important information about the social role, status and kin groups of the deceased, and those performing the funerary rites (Darish 1989). The process of weaving or decorating shrouds may have also played a significant role in the mourning process, constructing a series of memories about the deceased, the funeral rites and the roles played by participants (Bloch 1971;



Feeley-Harnik 1989). There is no reason why these considerations could not be applied to the Iron Age context.

Grave goods appear in approximately 50 percent of Arras Culture burials. Dress accessories, shroud pins, jewellery and pottery are the most common classes of grave goods. Dress accessories and jewellery may have been perceived as an extension of the self, and may not have been thought of in the same way as other classes of grave good like pottery or food offerings (Harper 2012). Pottery vessels sometimes retain the traces of food offerings, predominately the bones of sheep or pigs, which could have formed a portion of a funeral feast, or provisioned of the deceased with food for the afterlife (Dent 1984; Stead 1991). The most ostentatious Arras Culture burials included wheeled vehicles, frequently termed 'chariots', whilst in others status was signified through the provision of weapons, which appear with greater frequency in Arras Culture than other Iron Age burial traditions in Britain (Inall 2016).

### 3.2 'Chariot' Burials

To date, 23 'chariot' burials have been excavated within, or are located on the periphery of the geographic territory of the Arras Culture, forming an important sub-set of burial practice (Halkon 2013; Symonds 2017; Ware 2017)(Figure 2). However, the discovery of a chariot burial at Newbridge, near Edinburgh in Scotland, demonstrates the practice was not unique to the Arras Culture (Carter and Hunter 2002).

The practice forms part of a wider European tradition with recorded examples from Italy and France, appearing with greatest frequency around the mid-fifth century BC (Emiliozzi 2000; Anthoons 2011). The example from Newbridge is broadly contemporary, being radiocarbon dated to 520-370calBC (2350±50 BP - 2365±40 BP GO-1075110-2 calibrated at 91 percent probability) (Carter and Hunter 2002). The Arras Culture 'chariot' burials from Wetwang have been dated to approximately 200calBC (OxA-14112, OxA-14113, SUERC-26851) (Jay *et al.* 2012).

By the third century BC the continental distribution of 'chariot' burials was concentrated in the Paris basin and Northern Gaul (Anthoons 2011). The shared practice of chariot burial suggests that the Arras Culture and the Paris basin formed part of the same cultural exchange networks. However, distinct differences in practice between East Yorkshire and the continent indicate that the rite was either an independent innovation, or an indigenous adaptation of contemporary continental practice (Anthoons 2011; Halkon 2013).



Figure 2: An Arras Culture chariot burial during excavation by MAP Archaeology Ltd at Pocklington, East Yorkshire in February 2017. Photograph used with permission of MAP Archaeology Ltd.

### 3.3 Speared-Corpse Burials

The so-called 'speared-corpse' rite is unparalleled throughout Iron Age Europe and is exclusive to the Arras Culture (although some aspects of the rite are echoed elsewhere in Britain). Perhaps as many as 23 Arras Culture burials were subjected to this rite, in which spears were thrust or thrown into the open grave as part of the funerary rite (Inall 2015). The spears were delivered with force, occasionally piercing the corpse, and some spearheads exhibit clear damage to their tips (Stead 1991). The reasons for the performance of the rite remain unclear. However, these individuals were accorded burial rites in line with broader Arras Culture practices and include some of the best equipped burials of the period.

### 3.4 Durotrigian Inhumation

During the first century BC a 'new' Late Iron Age inhumation tradition developed, concentrated along the coastal region of modern Dorset, in the geographic area associated with the Durotriges tribe as described in Roman sources. This burial practice, termed Durotrigian inhumation, appears to have been a wholly indigenous development (Whimster 1981). Burials appeared in isolation, in small groups and larger cemeteries consisting of perhaps no more than 100 burials (Wheeler 1943; Whimster 1981; Davies *et al.* 2002).

The standard burial practice for Durotrigian inhumations was burial in an ovoid or sub-rectangular earth-cut grave, with the deceased placed in a flexed or contracted position, with the head in an easterly direction (ranging from NE to SSE) (Fitzpatrick 1997; Whimster 1981). A small number of burials were oriented in a westerly direction (Whimster 1981), and Parker Pearson (1999) has suggested that such orientations may represent bad deaths. The orientation of burials is broadly similar to the orientation of Iron Age roundhouses, and body placement may be referencing the sunrise or sunset (Parker Pearson 1999), potentially reflecting the time of year burial took place (Fitzpatrick 1997).

The majority of burials were placed on the right side, although burial on the left side or back was not uncommon (Whimster 1981; Fitzpatrick 1997; Davies *et al.* 2002). Only a very limited number of the individuals placed on their backs were laid out in a fully extended position. More frequently, bodies were placed with the legs flexed, and in some instances, in a crouched position (Whimster 1981). Placement on the back, with the legs extended was interpreted by Whimster (1981, 54-5) as indicative of a transition to Roman burial practices, with these increasing in frequency from the second century AD. Five burials from Durotrigian cemeteries at Maiden Castle, Dorset have been recorded as being placed in a prone position (lying face down) (Wheeler 1943; Whimster 1981). Four of these were recorded from the so-called 'War Cemetery', which displays a number of traits that differ from other Durotrigian cemeteries.

Grave goods in Durotrigian inhumations were broadly consistent with those included in other Iron Age burial traditions, appearing in approximately half of all burials, with pottery vessels, food offerings of sheep and pig, and dress accessories and jewellery being the classes of grave good that are most frequent finds. This practice continued into the early Romano-British period, gradually evolving or being subsumed into Roman inhumation practices (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

### 3.5 Cremation Burials

In the southeast of Britain, a new cremation tradition emerged from the late second century BC. This tradition has been discretely divided into the Aylesford-Swarling and Welwyn forms. These traditions were heavily influenced by contemporary Continental burial practices, including those from Roman Europe, but particularly northern France (Niblett 2000). They continued into the early Romano-British period, and it can be difficult to distinguish local from Roman practice for burials dated from the mid-first century AD (McKinley 2000). The geographic distribution of these burial practices included parts of Somerset, running across Dorset and Hamptonshire to Essex, Kent and through Hertfordshire as far north as the Cambridgeshire fens, with the highest concentrations in the south east (Whimster 1981; Fitzpatrick 2011). Cremations were conducted at pyre sites, which appear to have been communal, with the available evidence indicating their use for multiple events over time (McKinley 2000). Cemeteries were generally very small, with fewer than thirty burials, although two considerably larger cemeteries were recorded at Westhampnett, West Sussex and King Harry Lane, Hertfordshire (Harding 2015).

Distinct from other Iron Age burial traditions, grave goods were included in the majority of Aylesford-Swarling and Welwyn cremation burials (Fitzpatrick 2011; Harding 2015). The range of objects is also much broader, for example the Welwyn Garden City burial (Figure 3), which included feasting



accoutrements, and demonstrates a practice of conspicuous consumption, which is largely absent elsewhere in Iron Age Britain (Fitzpatrick 2011; Harding 2015; Inall 2015).

A discreet, independent cremation tradition also emerged at Rillington in Yorkshire, tentatively dated to the Late Iron Age by associated pottery fragments (Powesland 2003). Located in a tightly delimited area along a watercourse, these burials consisted of individual cremations under a small barrow, generally referred to as a barrowlet (Powesland 2013; Halkon 2013). The practice seems to post-date the Arras Culture burials rites, by perhaps two generations.



Figure 3: Reconstruction of the Welwyn Garden City Iron Age burial on display in the British Museum. Photograph by Yvonne Inall.

### ***3.6 Burials in Settlement Contexts***

In addition to the main traditions, discussed above, an array of additional burial practices has been noted for the Iron Age, including the deposition of fragmentary human remains in settlement ditches, pits and within homes (Armit and Ginn 2007; Redfern 2008). So-called pit-burials, with individuals inhumed in pits, many of which had seen previous use as grain stores, are possibly representative of propitiatory acts of human sacrifice (Cunliffe 1992). Cist burials appear to have been restricted to the southwest of Britain and Scotland (Whimster 1981). Multiple burials in settlement entranceways and ditches have previously been identified as the victims of massacres, but these may represent complex

ritual or funerary rites, the rationale for which has yet to be established archaeologically (Gresham 1939; Alcock 1972; Barrett *et al.* 2000; Waddington 2012).

Redfern (2008) observed indicators for processing of disarticulated human remains deposited in pits at Maiden Castle during the Middle Iron Age, a practice that appears to have been superseded in the Late Iron Age by Durotrigian inhumation. However, Fitzpatrick (2011) has argued that excarnation and secondary burial in settlement contexts continued alongside other inhumation and cremation burial rites in the south of Britain, with evidence of all three practices in Late Iron Age contexts across the Aylesford-Swarling and Welwyn cremation zone.

The practice of depositing fragmentary remains in settlement contexts was probably the most geographically widespread mortuary practice for all of Iron Age Britain. Armit and Ginn (2007) have recorded the practice across numerous sites, and there is evidence for the rite from the far south to the far north of Britain. While these practices have not always been identified as being of a funerary nature – indeed Armit *et al.* (2013) suggested at least some incidences may be indicative of trophy-taking activities – they may represent the core indigenous mortuary rite for much of Iron Age Britain.

## 4. Romano-British Burial Practices

The Roman period commences in AD43 when Claudius' campaign reached Britain. Over the following decades, a Roman presence became firmly established in the south east of Britain and pushed northward, reaching the Humber region by AD 70. Roman activity and influence in the southwest and north of Britain was relatively limited. The establishment of Roman military forts and associated settlements brought changes to the existing burial practices of Late Iron Age Britain.

Where archaeologically visible burial traditions were already established, such as the Durotrigian inhumation rite in southern Britain and the Aylesford and Welwyn cremation burial rites of the south east, change was gradual (Whimster 1981; Esmonde Cleary 1992; Pearce 2000). New rites appear to have been gradually syncretised with local practices. However, the Romanisation of burial practices was not uniform, and these new, intrusive elements quickly dissipated following the collapse of Western Roman power in the fifth century AD.

### 4.1 Preparation and Viewing of the Dead

Funerals for the social elite in Rome are well-attested in the ancient literature (summarised in Patterson 1992; Toynbee 1996). These were powerful displays, particularly for the funerals of prominent men (Toynbee 1996). Burial monuments to prominent families lined the streets into Rome and other Italian and provincial cities, offering an arena for social and political competition through memorialisation practices (Pearce 2000; Davies 2010). The costs associated with such funerals were substantial and it is clear that commemoration on this scale was not available to all citizens (Patterson 1992).

For those outside of the political elite, funerals may have lacked the extravagance, but not necessarily the care invested in ensuring the dead were accorded formal rites. Classical accounts suggest that, when death was anticipated, the dying were attended with final rites and a vocal lamentation was offered from the time of death until the funeral, a period which could last for days (Toynbee 1996).

Similar practices were likely enacted in Roman Britain, though they are difficult to identify archaeologically.

Preparation rites could also involve anointing the body as a purifying act, recorded in numerous Classical sources and seen in modern ethnographic parallels (Toynbee 1996; Zeeshan and Tabassum 2015). Residue analyses of Romano-British coffin burials has identified the use of exotic unguents in some of the more elaborate, and thus better-preserved, inhumation burials from a number of sites from Dorset to Yorkshire (Brettell *et al.* 2015). The unguents identified included frankincense (*boswellia*) and pine (*pinaceae*) species. The pine cone is well-attested as a symbol of mourning in Roman religion (Alcock 1980). Traces of frankincense have also been identified from an early Romano-British cremation burial from the Mersea Island Barrow, Essex, suggesting similar preparation of corpses prior to cremation (Brettell and Heron 2013).

Evidence from gypsum packed coffin burials at Poundbury have preserved hairstyles, still with comb marks or intricate plaits demonstrating the importance of making the dead presentable, suggesting a period of display (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Careful dressing of the corpse also suggests viewing, consistent with the more lavish rites described in ancient sources. Men, women and children all appear to have been prepared for viewing in Romano-British rites (Wild 1970; Farwell and Molleson 1993; Ottaway 2004). While the performance of viewing the corpse is only indirectly recoverable from the archaeological record, historical and iconographic sources offer some detail, albeit for practices closer to Rome, and generally reflecting the social elite. An example of this appears in the second century AD Tomb of the Haterii from *Via Libicana* near Rome, depicting a deceased woman on a bier surrounded by mourners, garlands and incense burners – the scene well-lit by flaming torches and candelabras (Toynbee 1996). The profusion of flowering garlands and incense suggests strong odours, which could have had important roles in the formation of emotional sensory memories (Deeley 2004).

The dead could be buried fully-dressed or in a simple shroud. A Roman burial from Alington Ave, Dorchester, Dorset provides Britain's earliest example of purple and gold-trimmed cloth: these are colours associated with wealth and protection, with purple believed to have apotropaic powers as well as being associated with the Imperial class (Davies *et al.* 2002). At Verulamium, St Albans woollen textiles from a child's burial suggest different layers of clothing (Wild 1970). Others, including those given Christian burial, could be buried in shrouds. Cloth impressions preserved in the gypsum packing of coffins in York and other sites indicate that the cloth chosen was of variable quality, and likely repurposed from cloth already in the family's possession rather than made or procured specifically for the funeral (Wild 1970). However, the act of binding the deceased in a shroud undoubtedly formed a significant part of the funerary rites, which was possibly associated with the saying of prayers, as evidenced in modern ethnographic parallels (Bahar *et al.* 2012). Classical sources suggest that for most individuals the rites associated with preparation of the body were performed by members of the immediate family (Toynbee 1996).

Some inhumation burials also had gypsum poured over the body prior to burial, which hardened into a solid plaster packing (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Toynbee 1996; Davies *et al.* 2002; Ottaway 2004). The underlying motivation for the use of gypsum appears to be to slow or prevent the corruption of the corpse, and this has led to suggestions that this was a specifically Christian practice, although this

cannot be determined with any degree of certainty. What is clear is that gypsum was an expensive option and was most likely used in the burials of wealthier persons (Ottaway 2004).

## 4.2 Romano-British Cremations

Roman burial practices included both inhumation and cremation rites, although cremation rites predominated, as they had done since *ca.* 400 BC (Toynbee 1996). Cremation was also the dominant funerary rite for much of the western continent and the south-east of England during the pre-conquest period. Cremation burials in the south-east of England such as those from King Harry Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire and Welwyn Garden City bear similarity to Late Iron Age practices at Acy Romance and Clemency in France (Niblett 2000). The rites associated with these cremations appear to have been complex and elaborate, and may have been combined with the rite of excarnation at some sites (Niblett 2000; Fitzpatrick 2011). In the south-eastern cremation zone, cremation burials continued during the first century AD, with an increased diversity of associated grave goods as the primary indicator of change (Esmonde Cleary 1992). At the King Harry Lane cremation cemetery, St Albans Hertfordshire, only a small proportion of the cremation burials can be definitively identified as dating to the pre-conquest period due to the similarity in burial rites (Fitzpatrick 2000).

Two distinct forms of cremation burial are observed during the Romano-British period: *busta* and *ustrina* cremations. In the case of a *bustum* burial, the pyre was constructed over the grave pit and the pyre, human remains and pyre offerings collapsed into the pit as the pyre burned. This form of cremation rite does not appear to have been practiced in Britain during the pre-Roman period, and thus appears to be a rite specifically introduced by the Romans. Further, this rite appears to be concentrated around Roman military sites (Fitzpatrick 2000; Niblett 2000; Polfer 2000). Elsewhere the more frequent form of cremation was associated with *ustrina*, pyre sites, occasionally with permanent or semi-permanent structures. Examples recorded at Colchester and Verulamium indicate they could be used for an individual cremation, or be used repeatedly, and some Continental examples had use-lives in excess of 150 years (Polfer 2000).

Common to each of these rites was a clear emphasis on the rite of cremation as the core funerary rite, with the collection and deposition of cremated bone forming a secondary act (McKinley 2000). Modern engagement with cremation appears to make a similar distinction, with an emphasis placed on the public funeral service, after which the cremation takes place, and subsequent treatment of the cremated remains is more private and personalised (Kellaher and Worpole 2010). The rites accompanying cremation could involve sacrifices and performances, evidenced in both pre-Roman and Romano-British cremation burials (Niblett 2000). Cassius Dio (77.15), in his description of the cremation of the emperor Septimius Severus, describes the rites saying that soldiers, and the emperor's sons "ran about" the pyre (Ottaway 2004, quoting Earnest Cary 1927 translation). However, the Greek term used by Dio to describe this act *περιδρομεύς* can also be interpreted as "encircling" and a more appropriate translation may be "processed in a circle of honour" (*περιδρομῆ ἔτιμήθη*) (Liddell *et al.* 2011).

Following cremation rites in both pre-conquest and Romano-British *ustrina* traditions, collection of bone does not appear to have been complete. Some cremated bone was collected, often with a sample of pyre debris, and this was deposited in a burial, which appears to have formed a memorial,

or 'token' deposit (Fitzpatrick 2000; McKinley 2000; Niblett 2000). The reasons for partial deposition, and the question of what happened to the rest of the human remains, are difficult to determine. It is possible that the remains were divided, and deposited elsewhere, as evidenced in the cremation burial of the Emperor Septimius Severus, who died at York, but whose cremated remains were returned to Rome in a cinerary urn (Cassius Dio, , LXXVII.15). In particular, there may have been a practice of repatriating the remains of soldiers serving in *Britannia* to their home provinces. McKinley (2000, 43) suggests such practices "may explain the paucity of bone in burials, including those interpreted as *busta*". Cremation burials, for example those recorded at Camelon Falkirk, which contained no human remains, may have served as memorial deposits for individuals whose remains could not be recovered for burial (McKinley 2000).

A small number of Roman cremation burials were recorded outside of the south-eastern cremation zone. In the Durotrigian inhumation zone, Roman cremations are vastly overshadowed by inhumation burials. Only three cremation burials were recovered from a cemetery containing over 100 inhumations at Alington Avenue, Dorchester Dorset (Davies *et al.* 2002). At nearby Poundbury, Dorchester, three Romano-British cremations were also recorded from an extensive inhumation cemetery (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

Following the transition from cremation to inhumation burial during the second century AD, cremation burial was occasionally practiced as a conservative rite, which had seemingly become preserved as the exclusive privilege of the social elite (Ottaway 2004).

### 4.3 Inhumations

From the early second century AD, roughly from the reign of Hadrian onwards, inhumation began to increase in frequency across the Roman Empire (Toynbee 1996). By the third century AD inhumation had become the predominant funerary rite across the Roman world (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Davies *et al.* 2002; Ottaway 2004). In Dorset, where Durotrigian inhumation had prevailed in the century preceding the Roman Conquest, inhumation continued as the dominant burial rite, with a gradual shift from crouched burial on the right side with the head to the east, to extended, supine inhumations with the head orientated to the west (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Davies *et al.* 2002). At Poundbury, Durotrigian inhumation continued to be practiced even after other aspects of the settlement had clearly become Romanised, as indicated by the construction of rectangular buildings preceding some of the Durotrigian burials (Farwell and Molleson 1993). This suggests that burial practices may have been more resistant to Romanisation than other cultural aspects.

In the Romano-British period inhumation was extended to a far greater proportion of the population than during the Iron Age period. The number of inhumation cemeteries is considerable when compared to this earlier period (Esmonde Cleary 1992, 2000; Pearce 2000). Burial rites quickly became standardised, and, during the Late Romano-British period, reflect the growing influence of Christianity (Alcock 1980; Farwell and Molleson 1993). While the Iron Age period had seen a diversity of burial positions and orientations, inhumation in the Romano-British period was characterised by general uniformity. Burials were usually in supine, extended position, with the head oriented to the west. Deviations from this apparent norm include prone and decapitated burials, which indicate the



problematic deaths of social outsiders or persons who died a 'bad death'. Additionally the deaths of warriors or gladiators also included variations from the 'norm' (Hunter-Mann 2006; Tucker 2013).

The deceased were often buried in coffins of wood, lead or stone, the choice of material reflective of social status. Wooden coffins rarely survive in the archaeological record and are often detectable through the survival of the associated nails (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Pearce 2000; Davies *et al.* 2002; Ottaway 2004; Müldner *et al.* 2011). Staining in some burials has been interpreted as traces of coffins constructed either with or without nails (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Preservation of iron fittings from some wooden coffins indicate they may occasionally have been decorated (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Lead coffins could serve as the principal coffin, or as an interior lining for wooden coffin burials, a practice which appears to have been in favour during the first half of the fourth century AD (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Ottaway 2004). Stone coffins and sarcophagi were generally constructed of local stone, although, on occasion, imported stone was used. This was probably chosen to represent the place of origin of the person being buried (Farwell and Molleson 1993), as indicated by the Diaspora study undertaken as part of this project (Evans 2018).

Movement or repatriation of the dead may also have been practiced for inhumation burials, suggested by indications that bodies had shifted within their coffins, which is consistent with transport via cart over some distance (Farwell and Molleson 1993). The extent of some of the larger late Roman cemeteries notably exceeds the needs of the local settlements, suggesting that cemeteries serviced much larger catchment areas from the surrounding countryside and nearby settlements (Esmonde Cleary 2000).

Following the collapse of the Roman administration in Britain, evidence for inhumation burial goes into decline. Once again, funerary rites for the majority of the population became archaeologically invisible, in part no doubt due to the incursions of various non-indigenous groups after the removal of Roman protection. It is also likely that pre-existing indigenous burial rites, which may have continued to be practiced alongside Romano-British rites returned to the fore, with the lingering inhumation practice forming a minority rite (Esmonde Cleary 1992; Pearce 2000; Ottaway 2004; Lucy 2000).

#### **4.4 Lasting memorials: sarcophagi, gravestones and mausolea**

The Roman presence in Britain introduced new modes of memorialisation in the form of carved sarcophagi, gravestones and mausolea. Sarcophagi, though rare in Roman Britain, were prominently displayed above ground, and could be inscribed or ornately carved. Six sarcophagi are recorded from the extensive Romano-British cemeteries at York, which are datable to the late second to early third centuries "when there was a particular vogue for commemorating the dead in stone throughout the empire" (Ottaway 2004, 119).

Gravestones are one of the most important forms of evidence for memorialisation practices within the Roman Empire. However, Britain has relatively few gravestones compared to other Roman provinces on the Continent. In addition, gravestones also appear to have a limited distribution, concentrated on military sites and Romanised urban centres. These more frequently commemorated women and children as opposed to adult males (Esmonde Cleary 1992; Hope 1997). Stone monuments and mausolea were the purview of the wealthier mercantile and military classes but for the majority

of the population grave markers of perishable materials such as wood must have been used, as evidenced by a lack of intercutting in densely packed Romano-British cemeteries (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Ottaway 2004).

As Britain's earliest inscribed funerary monuments, gravestones gave voice to the bereaved (Hope 1997). Surviving inscriptions often demonstrate touching sentiment. In contrast to modern gravestones, it was customary to include the names of those who erected the monument, thus preserving relationships and giving explicit voice to mourners (a practice which was also observed in the diaspora studies undertaken as part of the Remember Me project (Evans 2018)). A particularly poignant example from Roman York reads:

*"To the spirits of the departed, Corellia Optata, 13 years old. Ye hidden spirits that dwell in Pluto's Acherusian realms, whom the scanty ash and the shade, the body's image, seek after life's little day, I, the pitiable father of an innocent daughter caught by cheating hope, lament her final end. Quintus Corellius Fortis, the father had this made"* (Ottaway 2004).



Figure 4: Gravestone dedicated to Regina, wife of Baretos of Palmyra, after Bruce (1885).

Through these inscriptions we also gain evidence for migration and integration, with the occurrence of foreign names, such as the gravestone (RIB 1919) of new-born Decibalus and his 10-year old brother, Blaesus at Birdoswald fort on Hadrian's Wall. These individuals were probably second generation migrant sons of a Dacian soldier stationed on the Wall (Wilmott 2001). A gravestone from South Shields, Tyne and Wear (RIB 1065), commemorates a local Catuvellaunian woman, Regina (Figure 4), erected by her husband Barates, who describes himself as from Palmyra, Syria (Hope 1997). The inscription is bilingual in Latin and Palmyrene, and it has been suggested that the sculptor was also Palmyrene (Vanderbilt 2014). A separate, fragmentary gravestone from Corbridge, Northumberland (RIB 1171) honouring '[...]rathes Palmoreus' may be her husband, although this is uncertain (Vanderbilt 2014).

Ivleva (2010, 2012) identifies the gravestones of several persons from *Britannia* in other European provinces. These include Virsuccius, who served with *cohors I Brittonum*, and who died in Pannonia (modern Serbia), aged 35 years, during the late first or early second

century AD. Also, Titus Statius, a 23 year old legionary from Colchester, who was commemorated in a plaque on the cemetery road into *Carnuntum* fort in Austria; and, 30 year old Catunectus in Cologne, described in his commemorative stele as Trinovantes, a tribe whose territory centred on modern Essex (Ivleva 2012).

There are several recurrent iconographic themes in the decoration of gravestones including males in military dress, mounted soldiers overpowering an enemy, seated women, and funerary feasts. Surprisingly, perhaps, there are a higher proportion of gravestones commemorating women than men, although it has been suggested that these women were most likely the wives of military personnel (Hope 1997). As Roman soldiers were not permitted to marry their relationships were not legally recognised. Thus, through the provision of a lasting monument, these women were given recognition and legitimisation in death that they could not have had in life (Hope 1997).

Some larger cemeteries included mausolea, noted, for example at Poundbury, Verulamium, York and Maiden Castle (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Niblett 2000; Ottaway 2004). In the main cemetery at Poundbury, eight mausolea were recorded (Farwell and Molleson 1993, 45). Mausolea, are elaborate architectural structures echoing the design and the decoration of houses, and essentially these were homes for the dead (Toynbee 1996). Mausoleum R8 at Poundbury had a frescoed interior with six different compositional schemes including a Christian panel, which featured a Chi Rho (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Those buried within mausolea appear to have been family groups, and, in keeping with the imposing style of their monuments, they often had stone or lead-lined coffins, indicative of elite funerary practice (Ottaway 2004; Farwell and Molleson 1993). The use-life of mausolea was generally only one or two generations. Some took on new use-lives as Christian chapels or were incorporated into later post-Roman settlements. Other mausolea fell prey to acts of iconoclasm or stone robbing and as such do not survive intact (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

#### **4.5 Unusual burials: prone, decapitated and other burials**

Within the tradition of Romano-British inhumation, ‘deviant’ burial practices have been observed, with these including decapitated and prone burials. Burials occasionally include grave-goods or other body treatments, which may indicate there was something different about the death, or afterlife of certain individuals. Men, women and, less frequently, children were subjected to such practices (Tucker 2013). Prone and decapitated burials were common in Britain throughout the Romano-British period. These have been recorded at numerous sites including Lankhills, Winchester, Poundbury, Dorchester and, prominently at York. Milella *et al.* (2015), note 156 burials with displaced crania and 127 prone burials (17 of which had their crania displaced) in their assessment of 266 inhumations throughout Britain, dated to the period from the first to the fifth century AD. Tucker (2013, 216) identified perhaps as many as 512 decapitated burials from 218 Romano-British sites, occurring more frequently in rural areas, with an observed “concentration southwest of the Severn-Wash line”. The discovery of a cluster of over 40 decapitated burials, all of men aged under 45, at Driffild Terrace, York in 2004-2005 is highly unusual, located in what is believed to have been an area of the cemetery associated with the social elite (Ottaway 2004; Hunter-Mann 2006; Müldner *et al.* 2011).

Close to the Roman Wall of London, pits of disarticulated human remains, predominately skulls (minimum number of individuals = 30) were filled over a period of time, between the first and late

second century AD, with the majority of the deposition taking place between *ca.* AD120-160 (Redfern and Bonney 2014). These burials were mostly men (90 percent of those who could be sexed were identified as male). It is unclear whether whole bodies were deposited into the pits, or if they were already disarticulated prior to deposition. The proximity of these deposits to the Roman amphitheatre has led to suggestions that these individuals may have been executed criminals or gladiators (Redfern and Bonney 2014).

The placement of the cranium in decapitated burials varied, within this included repositioning in the correct anatomical position, but with clear indicators that the cranium had been deliberately disarticulated from the post-cranial elements of the skeleton. In other burials the cranium could be placed between the legs or feet, or adjacent to the body. In rare cases, such as Poundbury burial 116, the cranium placed in the grave does not belong to the accompanying post-cranial skeleton (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Milella *et al.* (2015) also note five burials in which the cranium had not been buried with the remainder of the skeleton. Suggestions have been made that such burials may relate to a 'Celtic head cult' (Armit 2012).

Attempts to discern the motivations underlying decapitation burials have proved largely unproductive. Explanations range from judicial execution to fears that the dead will rise to trouble the living, human sacrifice, and rites which could either facilitate or obstruct the soul's passage to the Underworld (Tucker 2013). Attempts to understand the reasoning behind the unusual demography and frequency of decapitated burials at Driffield Terrace have led to a variety of interpretations that these men were Roman soldiers, executed criminals, or gladiators (Hunter-Mann 2006; Müldner *et al.* 2011). The execution of criminals and gladiators by decapitation is well-attested in ancient literature (Kyle 2012).

Prone burials also seem to indicate something 'other' about the individual being buried (Arcini 2009). A small cemetery area, known as Little Keep, approximately 80m south-east of the Poundbury main cemetery, excavated in 2007, yielded 29 late Roman burials (Egging Dinwiddy 2009). Twelve of these were prone and one had also been decapitated. A further four burials in the Little Keep area had also been decapitated. Three of the decapitated burials are part of a discrete cluster within the cemetery area; with non-metric skeletal traits suggesting a possible familial relationship (Egging Dinwiddy 2009). Decapitated and prone burials were also recorded from the (northern peripheral) late Roman cemetery at Poundbury, which may have been the burial place for community outsiders (Farwell and Molleson 1993). These included the prone burial of a congenitally deaf child, and another child whose lead isotope signature suggested he had migrated from Greece shortly before his death (Farwell and Molleson 1993). These burials support the idea that those decapitated prior to burial were not fully accepted into the broader community.

The lining of graves with stones has been interpreted, by Farwell and Molleson (1993), as an economical alternative to the use of a coffin, however, Black (1986) has previously argued that the practice may be better interpreted as a means of confining the dead. Similarly, Egging Dinwiddy (2009, 8) suggested that the large blocks of flint and chalk included in grave fills at Little Keep "may have been intended to keep the burial (and the individual's soul) in the grave".

The inclusion of iron nails in some burials may have been chosen for their apotropaic properties, as a means to 'fix' the dead in their graves (Black 1986; Egging Dinwiddy 2009; Dungworth 1998). Nails

appear in both cremation and inhumation burials, and their position within the grave, including over or under the body, in front of the face, close to the mandible, or, as a notable example from Poundbury, lodged between the teeth, suggesting deliberate structuring principles (Black 1986; Farwell and Molleson 1993; Davies *et al.* 2013; Egging Dinwiddy 2009). At Little Keep, Dorchester nails indicative of such practices were found in four burials, all “adult males, three of which had evidence for violent trauma” (Egging Dinwiddy 2009, 38). Alfayé Villa (2009) suggests that the practice likely began in ancient Greece, spreading to Rome, and then onwards to the western provinces of the Empire.

An even more explicit case, demonstrating a clear ill-intent towards the deceased, comes in the form of a lead curse tablet – pierced by multiple nails, which was included in burial 309 at Baldock, Hertfordshire (Westell 1931; Black 1986; Dungworth 1998). The wording on the tablet “*vetus quomodo sanies signeficatur Tacita deficta*” has been translated: “Tacita, or by whatever other name she is called, is hereby cursed” (Westell 1931, 111), carrying a visceral sense of betrayal.

#### 4.6 Children

The deaths of children in Romano-British communities were commemorated in a similar fashion to adults. Evidence indicates that children could be buried in coffins, were dressed for viewing and appear to have been accorded broadly similar burial rites to adult members of the community (Wild 1970; Farwell and Molleson 1993). Children are commemorated on some gravestones (discussed, above) and the anguish of loss could be palpably expressed on such monuments (Hope 1997; Wilmott 2001; Ottaway 2004).

Care in the burial of neonates extended to late miscarriages and stillbirths, observed at numerous sites (Farwell and Molleson 1993). However, burial of infants and children was not always commensurate with that of adults. During the early Romano-British period, when cremation was the dominant funeral rite, infants were inhumed rather than cremated (Ottaway 2004). This may be related to comments made by Pliny the Elder (VII.15) stating that infants who died prior to teething were not cremated. Children were less frequently buried in coffins, and neonates and infants especially, were rarely provisioned with grave goods such as shoes and food offerings to sustain them for the journey to the Underworld (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

While most children appear to have been buried in cemeteries along with adults, some cemeteries include clusters of infant and neonate burials (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Neonate burials also seem to have escaped the proscription on intramural burial, with some infants buried within settlements and, sometimes within buildings. This may be a continuation of earlier concepts of infant burials having magico-religious powers to protect members of the household or community, or to increase fertility (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

#### 4.7 Grave Goods

As occurred during the Iron Age, the majority of Romano-British burials were unfurnished. When grave goods were included they principally consisted of dress accessories, shoes, offerings of food and drink, and coins (Alcock 1980; Farwell and Molleson 1993; Pearce 2000; Ottaway 2004). Objects of personal adornment and dress accessories were often worn by the deceased. In general, grave goods reflected the social status, gender, and cultural and religious affiliations of the deceased and those who buried



them (Alcock 1980; Baldwin 1985; Black 1986; Chenery *et al.* 2011; Eaton *et al.* 2015; Ivleva 2010; Leach *et al.* 2010).

Feasting played a significant, but little-evidenced, role in the funerary rites of Roman Britain. Classical sources record the importance of the funerary feast known as the *silicernium* and a formal meal at the graveside, the *cena novendialis*, which signalled the close of the mourning period (Toynbee 1996; Alcock 2002). Funerary feasts are depicted on some gravestones dated to the second century AD from York, Chester and Hadrian's Wall (Hope 1997). The dead were thought, in one sense, to reside in their graves, and offerings of food were made at the graveside during religious festivals and days of commemoration; evidenced through the provision of pipes, into some graves, through which libations could be poured (Alcock 1980; Toynbee 1996).

Finds of animal bone in cremation burials, and offerings of food in inhumations appear to have been associated with provisioning the dead for the journey to the afterlife, or as sacrifices to the gods (Alcock 1980). Food offerings, meant to sustain the departed on their journey to the underworld, appear to be a continuation, or syncretism, of pre-Roman burial practice (Black 1986; Farwell and Molleson 1993; Niblett 2000; Pearce 2000; Davies *et al.* 2002). The provision of food and drink to sustain the deceased in the afterlife is a common theme throughout prehistory.

Hobnailed shoes have been preserved in both cremation and inhumation burials, again interpreted as provisions for the journey to the afterlife (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Toynbee 1996; Ottaway 2004). It is possible that the proportion of burials that included shoes was much greater, with those constructed of wholly organic materials not surviving in the archaeological record. Hobnails also appear in some Durotrigian burials (Whimster 1981), indicative of both contact with the Roman world, and possibly similar modes of funerary dress. The provision of footwear in Durotrigian burials may have been similarly motivated, to equip the deceased for the journey to the underworld.

The provision of coins amongst grave goods was a practice that clearly began in the Roman period. A coin would be placed in the mouth in inhumation burials, observed at a number of cemeteries including Alington Avenue and Poundbury, Chichester, Lankhills, Winchester, Catterick, North Yorkshire, and York (Alcock 1980; Baldwin 1985; Black 1986; Farwell and Molleson 1993; Wilson 2002; Ottaway 2004). These were ostensibly so that the deceased could render payment to Charon, the Ferryman, who would take them across the River Styx to the Underworld. The coins used in this practice date from the first to fourth centuries AD, although it appears to have been most popular as a practice during the fourth century AD, by which time Roman religious practice was broadly familiar, particularly in urban centres, where such rites have frequently been observed (Alcock 1980). While generally considered a pagan custom, Alcock (1980, 59) argues that early Christians may have included coins in burials either "as a double insurance policy", or as a "token payment for goods which ought to have been placed in the grave but were instead kept for the use of the living". Coins have rarely been preserved in cremation burials, however, it is possible that they were included amongst the pyre offerings, where they may not survive the cremation rite intact (Alcock 1980).

Provisioning the dead with lamps, to light the journey to the Underworld has also been observed in Romano-British burials, and they may have been deposited into the burial lit (Alcock 1980; Black 1986). Lamps were also lit as part of grave-side commemorative rituals including the *Parentalia* (a festival to

honour one's dead parents) and *Rosalia* (festival of roses) (Toynbee 1996). Bille and Sørensen (2007) and Deeley (2004) underscore the important role of the use of illumination and the contrasts of light and darkness in the performance of ritual actions.

The identification of distinctly Christian burials within Romano-British cemeteries is not clear-cut (Farwell and Molleson 1993). The absence of grave goods is often proffered as a clear marker of Christian burials, as doctrine dictated that there was no use for earthly possessions in the next life. Yet, a recurrent feature of British burial practices during the preceding Iron Age was a lack of grave goods (Whimster 1981). Approximately half of all burials dated to the Iron Age period were not provisioned with any grave goods at all, and the enduring absence of grave goods need not necessarily signal conversion to Christianity (Fitzpatrick 1997; Gwilt and Haselgrove 1997; Parker Pearson 1999; Dent 2010; Pope and Ralston 2011; Inall 2015). There is also evidence to indicate that some Christian burials were provisioned with grave goods, despite the proscription. For example, the fourth century burial of a young woman aged 18-23 near Sycamore Terrace in York was accompanied by grave goods which included a glass jug and a mirror along with an open work bone mount, possibly from her coffin, bearing a message with apparent Christian connotations: “*S[OR]OR AVE VIVAS IN DEO*” (“Hail, sister, may you live in God”) (Leach *et al.* 2010).

Burial in a shroud rather than in full-dress has also been proffered as an indicator of Christian burial. Unfortunately, cloth rarely survives in the burial environment, and we also have evidence that some Late Iron Age burials had also been shroud burials, as indicated by the presence of pins or brooches over the face, where the shroud cloth must have been secured (Evans *et al.* 2006). Ultimately, a lack of grave goods and shrouded burial were not exclusive features of Christian burial. However, an increase in the frequency of such practices may be indicators of burgeoning Christian practice, while other rites, which did include grave goods, or full dress, declined in frequency.

#### 4.8 Placing the Dead: Organised Cemeteries

Roman law strictly forbade burial within the walls of a settlement (with the exception of some neonate and infant burials). Urban cemeteries were extramural. The desire to keep departed loved ones close remained important, and cemeteries were located on the roads leading into urban settlements (Pearce 2000; Toynbee 1996). For the rural population, burial was also close to settlements, and the social elite, with rural villa estates, were frequently buried on their rural properties rather than in the urban cemeteries (Esmonde Cleary 1992).

During the Late Romano-British Period (third-fourth centuries AD), organised cemeteries appear in some of the larger settlements. York, Poundbury and Lankhills, for example, all had organised cemeteries with regularly spaced burials, packed tightly into a delimited area. The level of organisation represented in these cemeteries has lead McKinley (2000) to argue that the processes of burial had reached a degree of professionalization in late Roman Britain. Certainly, Classical texts make multiple references to professions associated with the disposal of the dead (Toynbee 1996), including classes of undertakers: *libitinarii* for the social elite, who were assisted by apprentices called *pollinctores*, and *vespilliones* for the poorer members of society (a term which could also be applied to grave-robbers). Cremations were conducted by professional *ustores* and graves dug by *fossores*. *Dissignatores* oversaw the funeral ceremonies of the social elite which, as mentioned above, could be elaborate.

## 4.9 *Diasporas and migrants*

Roman citizens and non-citizens alike moved extensively throughout the geographic expanse of the Empire (Pearce 2000). Soldiers and auxiliaries could be deployed far from their homes, and locally recruited troops intermingled with new migrants, and travelled with them when they were stationed elsewhere.

Identifying migrant burial practices in Roman Britain is more varied and complex than it might initially appear. Excavations at Lankhills cemetery, Winchester in the 1970s revealed a small number of unusual burials, which the excavator thought might represent immigrants to the region (Clarke 1979; Baldwin 1985). Records indicated that soldiers at Winchester had originated in the Danubian and Pannonian provinces. Grave goods included brooch and bracelet forms, which also indicated a Danubian or Germanic origin for these individuals. However, isotopic analysis conducted on samples from a number of burials in the cemetery demonstrated that origin was much more varied with individuals from Britain, Eastern Europe and Southern Germany represented (Evans *et al.* 2006; Eckardt *et al.* 2009). Further, some 'Pannonian' burials were of individuals with isotopic values consistent with the local geology, indicating that they had lived the majority of their lives, and had been born, in the local area. Some of the burials, which were interpreted as 'local' based on burial form and grave goods, were of those whose isotopic signatures indicated that they were incomers (Eckardt *et al.* 2009). Thus it appears some locals may have adopted 'foreign' identities, perhaps due to a parent being non-local, and some 'foreigners' seemingly adopted local identities.

There are also indicators for individuals from Britain travelling abroad and being buried and memorialised in distant parts of the Empire. Swift (2010) has argued that a concentration of Romano-British style bracelets found in fourth and fifth century burials from Krefeld-Gellep in the Rhineland is indicative of British women travelling to the region, and that their ethnic identity was asserted through the jewellery which they wore in life, as well as in the grave. Similarly, Romano-British brooch forms are found in concentrations in the western provinces, and Ivleva (2010) has made a plausible case for their association with military units recruited in Britain. Explicit evidence of individuals emigrating from Britain comes from gravestones, as discussed above.

## 4.10 *Gender bias: an under-representation of women?*

The demography of some larger Roman cemeteries is skewed in favour of males. Many of the cemeteries where gender disparity has been noted are closely associated with the Roman military, and there may have been fewer women in the community as a result (Farwell and Molleson 1993). Military widows may have also returned to their home provinces. Watts (2001) noted a similar gender bias in cemeteries at non-military sites and argued that the under-representation of women is a direct result of female infanticide. It is clear from the osteological and pathological analysis at Poundbury that girls had generally poorer nutrition and health status than boys, as is commonly observed in pre-industrial agrarian societies (Farwell and Molleson 1993).

Constructions of gender are clearly articulated in the burials of young women, and may include a number of bracelets, possibly representative of a dowry (Farwell and Molleson 1993; Swift 2010; Shaw *et al.* 2016). Older adults could be buried with items of personal adornment, which also have gendered



associations, and finger rings, bracelets, necklaces of strung beads, and brooches could indicate social status, or reflect roles the deceased had held within the military or Imperial administration (Davies *et al.* 2002; Ivleva 2010; Swift 2010; Redfern 2015).

Mismatches between the gendered associations of burial assemblages and osteological determinations of biological sex are not generally observed, albeit with two possible exceptions: Harper Road Woman, and the Catterick 'eunuch' (Redfern 2016). Excavations conducted in 1979 at Harper Road, Southwark, London uncovered a first century AD burial (Westman *et al.* 1998). Initial osteological assessment determined the skeleton to be that of a female aged around 35 years of age, and the inclusion of "an engraved bronze neck ornament and a square bronze mirror" were also consistent with female gender (Westman *et al.* 1998, 388). Recent osteological reanalysis also identified the remains as those of a female aged between 26-35 years of age (Redfern 2015; Shaw *et al.* 2016). However, the results of DNA analysis tested positive for genes associated with the Y-chromosome, suggesting that this individual was biologically male. Redfern (2016), who conducted the osteological reanalysis, suggested that this individual may have lived their entire life unaware of the male aspects of their biology, and the accompanying grave goods indicate this person was socially accepted as a female member of the community.

A more unusual case is a fourth century AD burial from Catterick, North Yorkshire. This burial, of a young adult male aged 20-25 years, was placed in a supine extended position with his head to the west (Wilson 2002). This attitude is typical of late Roman burials, however, the accompanying grave goods were highly unusual for a male burial. In death this individual wore a jet necklace with a silver clasp, a jet bracelet, a shale armband, copper alloy anklet and hobnailed shoes (Wilson 2002). The distinct mismatch between biological sex, and the gender associations of the accompanying grave goods led Cool (2002) to suggest this individual was perhaps a devotee of the goddess Cybele, whose male acolytes were known to castrate themselves in a sacrificial act, thereafter adopting female modes of dress. This interpretation is not universally accepted (Redfern 2016). The preservation of human bone from the site was generally poor, and although Mays (2002) was confident in his identification of the skeleton as male, to date no verifying DNA testing has been undertaken. Isotopic analysis, conducted on samples from Romano-British Catterick, indicate that this individual may have been an incomer to the region, and may have consumed a slightly different diet than the majority of the population (Chenery *et al.* 2011).

## 5. Anglo-Saxon Burial Practices

The Anglo-Saxon, or Early Medieval period in Britain was a time of profound change. Chronologically, the period falls between the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century and the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century. The social upheavals of the intervening centuries were negotiated in numerous ways and involved multiple changes to the performance of funerary rites and acts of commemoration.

By the end of the Romano-British period funerary rites in Britain had become largely standardised, with unfurnished supine, extended inhumation on a west-east orientation the dominant practice (Toynbee 1996). The collapse of the Western Empire occurred at a time when people and ideas were on the move. The Anglo-Saxon period is marked by the arrival of a number of intrusive groups to

Britain, although the level of influence on burial practice was arguably greater than the physical movement of people. Many aspects of Late Anglo-Saxon burial practice were common to the incoming Normans. Thus there was a continuation of practice into the Norman period, which makes Late Anglo-Saxon burials difficult to distinguish from post-Conquest medieval burial practices, without radiocarbon dating of burials (Zadora-Rio 2003; Hills 2009).

However, it is now generally accepted that the Anglo-Saxon period did not involve a wholesale transplantation of Germanic migrants (Lucy 2000). It is estimated that during the period from the fifth to the seventh centuries AD approximately 10 percent of the British population were migrants, with immigrants from Scandinavia and Saxon Germany forming the largest proportion of incomers (Härke 2011). Those who migrated to Britain brought their funerary rites with them, and changes in burial practice saw the reintroduction of cremation burial in the fifth century AD, influenced by contemporary Continental funerary rites in Scandinavia and Germany (Williams 2006). Classes of grave good, which had long been absent, also reappear in the archaeological record. There was a re-engagement with past monuments, and burial practices reveal concerns with ideas of place, ancestry, legacy and legitimacy (Williams 2006; Semple 2013).

### **5.1 Funerary Rites**

It is clear that a great deal of care and attention was focussed on the dressing and presentation of the dead in Anglo-Saxon funerals. Williams (2006) argues that Anglo-Saxon funerary rites were staged affairs, both in the sense that they incorporated periods of display, sometimes featuring carefully constructed tableaux. They also involved sequential episodes of mnemonic performance involving display and exposure, contrasted against enclosure and concealment, which may have taken place over a period of time. Furthermore they incorporated physical movement or relocation of the departed, the bereaved, and mourners (Williams 2006). Dress accessories including ornate brooches, buckles and strap-ends could have been concealed beneath layers of clothing, such as external cloaks or veils. Other objects such as spindle whorls, pendants, pins, keys, and other (possibly amuletic) objects were concealed in many burials, being contained within bags worn about the waist, or placed in 'relic boxes'. Similarly, the placement of some grave goods, including weapons, beneath coffins, suggests that the open grave was subject to viewing by mourners prior to the deposition of the body (Williams 2006). Williams (2006, 77) argues that the collection of these objects played a significant role in the commemoration of the deceased individual, mediating "relationships between living individuals and communities and the memory of the dead person".

Anglo-Saxon burial practices included both cremation and inhumation. Burials associated with each of these rites could appear side by side in the same cemeteries, or occur in cemeteries exclusively dedicated to one rite or the other (Lucy 2000). Both rites shared common elements, with indications that the rites were staged sequentially, with periods of display, concealment and performance, and evidence of funerary offerings either placed on the funerary pyre, or deposited in the grave (Williams 2006). There is also evidence to support the observation that cremation urns were curated for some time prior to burial, with multiple urns buried in a single grave, and examples of cremations deposited in inhumation burials (Williams 2006).

Funerary rites in the Anglo-Saxon world appear to have adhered to prescribed conventions, and from the seventh century rights to perform particular kinds of funerary rite were more tightly controlled (Brundle 2014). In addition, from the seventh century onwards access to cremation as a form of funerary rite was predominately restricted to male elites (Lucy 2000). Grave goods also become less common from the seventh century, again being increasingly restricted to elite burials (Hines and Bayliss 2013).

## 5.2 Cremation

Practiced primarily in East Anglia and the East Midlands, early Anglo-Saxon (fifth to early seventh century AD) cremation rites incorporated many elements common to pre-Roman and early Romano-British cremation rites in Britain (McKinley 2000; Williams 2003, 2004b). The cremation cemetery at Spong Hill, Norfolk, which yielded approximately 2,300 cremation burials, is seen as being broadly representative of this activity (Lucy 2000). Cremation burial was in decline in the seventh century and, as in the preceding Roman period, the rite became increasingly restricted to the social elite, while inhumation returned to the fore as the dominant rite visible in the archaeological record (Toynbee 1996; Brundle 2014).

The deceased was laid on a bier, likely fully dressed, and offerings were added to the pyre prior to burning. Bond (1996) highlights that the level of resource investment required when large offerings (particularly of animals) are added to the pyre, increases significantly due to the amount of fuel required to ensure the destruction of the offerings in addition to the corpse. The cremation itself would have been a multi-sensory experience, which would have left a lasting impression on participants and viewers (Williams 2006). However, the actual location used for the cremation rites during this period remains largely unknown. Entire Anglo-Saxon cremation cemeteries have been excavated without any indications for the presence of an on-site pyre (Lucy 2000). The Early Anglo Saxon cemetery at Snape, Norfolk preserves one of the few pyre sites recorded for the period (Brundle 2014).

Following the cremation rite, the burned human remains, and some of the burnt pyre offerings, were collected and placed into a cinerary urn (Figure 5). The collection of human bone appears to have been conducted with great care and urn deposits contained very little pyre debris (Lucy 2000). Williams (2003) has suggested that tweezers included in grave goods may have been used for the collection of smaller bones. While Romano-British cremation burials frequently consisted of 'token' deposits, comprising only a small proportion of human bone (McKinley 2000), the collection of bone for deposition at Spong Hill, Norfolk ranged from token deposits of approximately 100g, to over 3kg, the latter being indicative of total collection (Lucy 2000).

The urn selected to contain the remains of the deceased could vary significantly in form and decoration. It would appear that selection was influenced by the identity and/or status or social role of the deceased (Ravn 2003). Infants were interred in small jars, adults in much taller vessels, and wide-rimmed vessels were frequently selected for the cremation burial of adult females (Williams 2006). It is possible that the urn was viewed as a newly constructed, imperishable 'skin' or 'body' for the deceased in their new ancestral state, in what Williams (2003) interprets as a rite of incorporation.

Interactions with the urn may thus have been perceived as interactions with the deceased person as an individual, and their ancestral identity.

Following an unknown period of time the urn could be buried, usually in a shallow grave. Cremation urns could be buried in multiple interments, or deposited in inhumation burials, as part of a combined funerary rite, possibly for related individuals. Williams (2006) has hypothesised that cremated remains were kept in urns, probably above ground, and within the community, or even possibly curated within the home for some time.

While archaeological research frequently focusses on the destructive act of the cremation pyre as the core funerary rite in cremation burial, Williams (2003) highlights that post-cremation rites were probably equally important. The cremation served as a rite of separation, removing the deceased from the living world, and is thus key to their transformation. Post-cremation rituals finalised this process and served as a rite of incorporation, signifying the complete transition to a new identity state (Williams 2003).



Figure 5: A fifth century AD Anglo-Saxon cremation urn (1852,0429.2.a ) on display in the British Museum. Photograph by Yvonne Inall.

### 5.3 Inhumation

The Anglo-Saxon practice of inhumation burial appears to have been a carefully organised sequence of performative events. The preparation of the grave appears to have formed a significant part of the funerary rites. This could involve lining the grave with natural organic materials such as moss or grasses, or the addition of linen linings, which may have included tapestries (Owen-Crocker 1999; Brundle 2014). The placement of objects in view prior to the deposition of the coffin could have

created powerful statements about the social role of the deceased and the 'closure' or transformations of role and status that come about as a result of physical death (Williams 2006).

Supine, extended burial with the head to the west continued to be the predominant burial attitude during the Anglo-Saxon period (Haughton and Powlesland 1999; Lucy 2000). However, variations included flexed and crouched burials, some of which may have sought to emulate earlier practices of a perceived ancient past, which were stimulated by the Anglo-Saxon discovery of Bronze Age and Iron Age burials (Williams 2006). When burial orientations deviated from the west-east alignment this was often dictated by their reference to pre-existing monuments (Haughton and Powlesland 1999). Body position may also have exhibited regional preferences. Haughton and Powlesland (1999) suggested that the prevalence of flexed and crouched burials at West Heslerton, Yorkshire may reflect a continuation of Iron Age traditions, although this could not be stated with certainty.

There is clearly differential investment in grave construction based on social status. At Street House, Loftus, East Yorkshire, graves which yielded weapons or jewellery tended to be longer, wider and deeper than the graves of burials which were unfurnished (Sherlock 2012). The elite boat burials at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk (discussed below) required significant investment in the construction of new barrows (Carver 1998). However, at West Heslerton there was no clear correlation between grave size and the "quality and quantity of the grave assemblage", nor was there any evidence of associated four-post structures which might have been linked to grave display or elaboration (Haughton and Powlesland 1999, 88).

#### ***5.4 Traumatic/Tragic/Problematic Death and Deviant Burials***

Deviant burial practices are observed throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. However, the treatment of, and underlying rationale for deviant burials changed over time. During the early Anglo-Saxon period deviant burials primarily took the form of prone burial, being situated within cemeteries which predominately consisted of burials concordant with normative funerary practice (Haughton and Powlesland 1999; Reynolds 2009). Prone burials could also be furnished with grave goods associated with high social status (Haughton and Powlesland 1999). Haughton and Powlesland (1999) argue that prone burial was more common in the north than in the south, thereby suggesting regional differences in this burial practice. It should also be noted that prone burial was a recurrent feature of the Arras Culture burial tradition in Iron Age East Yorkshire (Stead 1991), and the possibility that Anglo-Saxon prone burial represents a continuation of this practice should perhaps be considered. A number of prone burials have been suggested to represent live burial, however, this interpretation has been questioned (Lucy 2000; Williams 2006; Reynolds 2009).

By contrast, during the late Anglo-Saxon period (from the late seventh century to the Norman Conquest), deviant burials consist predominately of decapitated burials, clustered together in what have been identified as 'execution cemeteries' (Buckberry and Hadley 2007; Reynolds 2009). Decapitation in this context could be the cause of death, or it may represent a post-mortem form of punishment: destroying the soul of the deceased whilst simultaneously protecting the living from supernatural reprisals. Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries could be in use over extended periods of time. Some execution cemeteries may have commenced in the early Anglo-Saxon period and many continue to the time of the Norman Conquest, and possibly beyond (Lucy 2000; Reynolds 2009). It is

clear that their use increases with the spread of Christianity during the latter half of the first millennium AD.

During the late Anglo-Saxon period individuals who had been buried in execution cemeteries also appear to have been exposed for varying periods of time prior to burial (Reynolds 2009). While the motivation for exposure in other practices may be linked to processes of transformation or enshrinement, the exposure of execution victims fulfilled different aims. Perceived as criminals or social outcasts, exposure to the elements, prior to burial in a 'damned' place (discussed below), served as a warning to others of the penalties in store for prospective offenders. Exposure in this manner also formed a further mode of punishment, leaving the physical flesh vulnerable to predators and the elements (Williams 2006). Multiple burial was also more common in 'execution cemeteries', frequently consisting exclusively of adult males (Reynolds 2009).

Deviant burial practices also include covering individuals with stones: seen as attempts by the living to deal with problematic death (Reynolds 2009). These burials appear to juxtapose memorialisation with deliberate attempts to forget, or to stifle the afterlife of certain individuals in a manner that would allow the living to continue their lives untroubled by potentially dangerous revenants.

## 5.5 Grave goods

Grave goods in Anglo-Saxon burials include a diverse range of object classes. Decisions about which objects were considered appropriate for burial appear to have been strongly influenced by age, gender and social status. The provision of objects, which had not been the personal property of the deceased during life, could have played a significant role in the renegotiation of relationships between the living and the dead (King 2004). The funerary ritual may have also influenced decisions around grave goods, with weapons being more common in inhumation burials, while combs, toilet sets, pottery vessels and animal offerings appear to have played a more significant role in cremation burials (Williams 2003). From the latter half of the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon graves were increasingly unfurnished. While it has been argued that this is related to Christian conversion, broader socio-economic factors appear to have been at play, with burial practices becoming more tightly controlled and the provision of grave goods seemingly restricted to the social elite (Hines and Bayliss 2013; Brundle 2014).

### 5.5.1 Dress Accessories

Brooches form an important class of grave good indicating mode of dress, as outlined above. During the fifth and sixth centuries brooches were placed over the shoulders of female inhumation burials, indicative of a peplos style dress, fixed at the shoulders (Martin 2011). Pins of metal, sometimes accented with stone heads, were worn at the neck, and probably fixed a cloak or shawl (Dickinson 1999; Sherlock 2012). However, brooches were not always deposited in burials as clothing accessories. Brooches could also be placed close to the head, or lower legs (Lucy 2000). It is clear that some brooches included in Anglo-Saxon burials date to an earlier period than other objects in the burial, probably being deposited as heirlooms. The inclusion of heirloom brooches in burials allowed for the expression of genealogy and ties to the past, or they may have represented special roles within the community (Lucy 2000; Brundle 2014). The provision of brooches therefore may not have been the daily costume of the deceased, but may have formed an important part of the structured preparation and display of the deceased (King 2004; Williams 2006).



## 5.5.2 Jewellery

Like brooches, items of jewellery appear to have been predominately worn about the person. Female graves dated from the fifth to the seventh century could include glass beads, and pendants (Figure 6). Bullae pendants, appear as part of necklaces in female burials during the latter half of the second century AD (Sherlock 2012). The pendants, which had also appeared in non-adult burials of the Romano-British period, are thought to have been worn as amulets, which served an apotropaic function (Alcock 1980). Similarly, scutiform pendants found in sixth century female burials, and Migration Period burials in Norway and Denmark, represent miniature shields, which are thought to have been intended to ward against supernatural dangers (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). Other female burials included metal fittings from functional shields, which had been reworked into items of jewellery (Dickinson 2005). Bracteates – thin metal pendants made from gold, silver or copper alloy – have been recovered from predominately adult female burials (Behr 2010). Worn as amulets, bracteates originated in Scandinavia and began appearing in Anglo-Saxon burials from the mid-fifth century (Webster 2012). Their distribution is concentrated in Kent, but examples have also been found as far north as Humberside, as far west as Warwickshire and as far south as the Isle of Wight (Behr 2010). Bracteates were ornately decorated with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs adapted from Scandinavian to local styles.



Figure 6: Seventh century AD Anglo-Saxon bulla pendant from Snetterton, Norfolk (PAS ID: SF-71F723). Photograph Portable Antiquities Scheme, used under creative commons licence.

Beads recovered from burials constituted necklaces, or were strung across the chest between two shoulder-brooches (Lucy 2000). They appear in a range of forms, and are constructed of diverse materials including glass, precious metals, composite metal and glass, amber and stones, such as jet, rock crystal and amethyst (Sherlock 2012). Beads were almost exclusively associated with female burials. A single male burial at West Heslerton, East Yorkshire included a bead, worn about the waist, probably suspended from a belt. This object possibly functioned as a token or amulet (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). The use of beads as tokens may have been more widespread, as there are examples of female graves in which single beads were concealed within pouches or purses (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). Such objects may have served as tokens of remembrance, with their selection for inclusion in the burial forming part of the careful mnemonic performance described by Williams (2006). Items of jewellery could also reference a perceived ancestral past, with the occasional reuse of Iron



Age or Roman objects occurring: such as the incorporation of an Iron Age glass bead fragment into an Anglo-Saxon gold pendant setting (Sherlock 2012).

### 5.5.3 Toilet sets and Combs

Composed of tweezers, picks, ear-scoops, and sometimes accompanied by shears, knives or combs, toilet sets appear in cremation and inhumation burials of adult males and females (Lucy 2000; Williams 2006). Examples from cremation burials do not appear to have been subjected to extreme heat, indicating that they were deposited in the cinerary urns as part of the post-cremation rites (Williams 2006). The sets were constructed of iron or copper alloy, and sometimes appear as non-functional miniatures, for which Williams (2006) suggested an amuletic function.

Combs are associated with the care and maintenance of the body in daily life, and may have been employed in the preparation of the corpse as part of the funerary rites. Williams (2003, 2006) has explored the role of combs in Anglo-Saxon funerary contexts, and notes they are particularly common in cremation burials. He has argued that the deposition of combs may have played a role in the transformation of the deceased to an ancestor state, and that they could have signalled an end of a formal mourning period for the bereaved (Williams 2003). Further, he also argues that the deposition of broken, incomplete combs may have served as tokens of remembrance, with pieces retained or distributed amongst mourners.

### 5.5.4 Weapons and Armour

Weapons were a strongly gendered class of grave good in Anglo-Saxon burials, appearing almost exclusively in male burials. The few female burials thought to have included martial objects come from older, poorly recorded excavations (Lucy 2000). Härke's (1990) assessment of Anglo-Saxon burials from 54 sites indicated that 47 percent of adult male inhumations included weapons. Härke (2011) has further argued that the inclusion of weapons functioned as a strong marker of male Anglo-Saxon cultural identity, with these being indicative of social status rather than an active martial role in the community. Very few of those buried with weapons show evidence of the forms of physical trauma normally associated with interpersonal violence (Lucy 2000).

Weapons burials of the fifth and sixth century could be furnished with the full complement of shield, sword and spear (Lucy 2000). The spear was the most frequently included martial object, appearing in 80 percent of the martial burials assessed by Härke (1990), followed in frequency by shields, which appeared in half of the martial burials in his sample. Other classes of weapon included swords and seaxes (large knives), which appeared in up to 10 percent of inhumation burials, while axes and arrowheads were included in less than 5 percent of the inhumations assessed. Exceptional burials of the later Anglo-Saxon period also included armour and helmets, discussed below (Lucy 2000). The position of most weapons, outside of the coffin, has led Williams (2006, 59) to suggest that they should be considered as "gifts" rather than part of the deceased's funerary costume. There was some standardisation in the placement of weapons within graves, with spears usually placed by the right side with the spearhead close to the head (Härke 1990). Their placement within burials would have formed an important aspect of mnemonic practice, constructing striking visual displays.

The archaeological evidence reveals that the composition and frequency of weapons burials changed over time. During the fifth and sixth centuries arrowheads and axes appeared in some weapons burials, but by the seventh century these weapon classes no longer appear in burials. The seax appears from the sixth century and continues into the seventh. Overall, there was a clear peak in the practice of including weapons as grave goods in male burials during the mid-sixth century, followed by a sharp decline, with the practice coming to an end during the early seventh century (Härke 1990; Lucy 2000).

Shields, in addition to functioning as items of defensive martial equipment, had a symbolic apotropaic function (Lucy 2000). Metal fittings preserved from more than 20 Anglo-Saxon shields recovered from burials dated from the mid-sixth to the early seventh century often feature zoomorphic decoration, which Dickinson (2005) argues enhanced their protective power, both on the battlefield, and in the grave. The standard positioning of shields within inhumations was directly overlaying the body. Occasional examples have been noted where these were propped against the wall of the grave to either the right or left of the body (Härke 1990). They were included in adult and juvenile male burials, and, in some instances, were the only martial object included as part of the grave assemblage (Härke 1990). Like swords, some shields may have been prized heirloom or gift objects, for example the shields from Sutton Hoo mounds one and two were dated to a period perhaps two generations prior to their deposition in burials (Carver 1998; Dickinson 2005).

Weapons appear to have been subject to age grading, with miniature weapons recovered from some infant burials (Lucy 2000). Young adult males were most likely to be buried with weapons. Regional variation is apparent (Härke 1990). At Berinsfield, Oxfordshire only one young adult male was buried without martial objects (Williams 2006). By contrast, older males were less likely to be buried with martial objects, and there were clear differences in the martial assemblages between age groups. Spears appeared in male burials of all age groups from non-adults through to mature adults, but shields were not included in any of the non-adult burials, and appeared with greatest frequency in the burials of adult males aged 20-40 years (Williams 2006). At West Heslerton only one non-adult under the age of 12 years was buried with weapons and seven adolescent burials were furnished with martial objects. At Sewerby, Yorkshire, all martial burials were of adult males aged older than 25 years (Lucy 1998).

Burnt weapon fragments have been recovered from a very small proportion of Anglo-Saxon cremation burials (Lucy 2000), with Härke (1990) noting that they accounted for fewer than one percent of burials in his assessment of 47 Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Williams (2003) has suggested that weapons may have played a role in pre-or-post-cremation rites, perhaps including periods of display and possibly involving their redistribution, which meant that they did not enter the archaeological record. Ethnographic comparisons, including modern funerary practices in Britain, do record the display of objects during funerary rites, which are later reclaimed and kept or distributed by mourners, lending some plausibility to Williams' (2003) proposal (Lemonnier 2007; Harper 2012).

A small proportion of offensive weapons show evidence that they were subjected to acts of deliberate destruction prior to deposition in the grave (Lucy 2000). Härke (1990), states that the practice was geographically restricted to Norfolk and the east midlands.

Armour and helmets seem to have been the unique preserve of elite burials (Härke 1990). Helmet finds are known from Sutton Hoo, Suffolk; Benty Grange, Derbyshire and Wollaston, Nottinghamshire. The gilt helmet from Sutton Hoo is ornately decorated, featuring dragon, boar and human-figured motifs (Webster 2012; Brundle 2014). The helmets from Benty Grange and Wollaston were decorated with boar figurines, whose spines would have formed bristling crests (Lucy 2000).

### 5.5.5 Knives

Knives form one of the most common classes of grave good for the Anglo-Saxon period, appearing in approximately fifty percent of furnished burials (Härke 1989). Knives included single-edged, double-edged and curved-bladed forms, usually placed by the waist, suggesting that they were attached to a belt, and enclosed in a leather sheath (Lucy 2000). Their provision is influenced by gender and age, with the majority of knives appearing in male burials, of all age classes. Although, it should be noted that a significant number of adult and juvenile female burials also included knives (Härke 1989). King (2004) has suggested that the knives and flint scrapers included as grave goods in a number of early Anglo-Saxon neonate and infant burials were gifts from mourners. Knives appear in a limited number of non-adult burials, and are exceedingly rare in burials of children under five years (King 2004).

### 5.5.6 Animal Remains

Animal offerings have frequently been noted in early Anglo-Saxon cremation burials. They appear, for example, in 43 percent of cremation burials at Spong Hill, Norfolk (Bond 1996), however, by contrast they are rarely recovered from Anglo-Saxon inhumations (Williams 2001). Consequently, Williams (2003) suggests that animal offerings may have been of greater significance in cremation rites, where they were clearly added to the pyre. Their burnt bones were collected along with the human remains after firing, and there is evidence to suggest that, for some cremations at Spong Hill, attempts were made to separate the animal and human remains prior to burial. These remains were deposited in two separate urns, one containing mostly human bone, with some animal bone, the other holding predominately animal bone, with some human remains mixed in (Lucy 2000). Animal species were primarily domesticates – sheep/goat, pig, cattle, dogs and horses – but wild species including red and roe deer, bear, beaver and fox were also represented (Bond 1996).

The motives underlying the choice of animal included in pyre offerings may have been as sacrifice, as food offerings, or as a combination of both. There is also an apparent link between animal offerings and the sex and age of the deceased. Williams (2001) suggests that animal carcasses may have been divided up for sacrifice, with some parts placed on the pyre, and other portions reserved for the funerary feast. The presence of butchery marks were observed on animal bone from Spong Hill, most frequently on sheep/goat and pig bones, supports this observation (Bond 1996). Horse bones sometimes showed evidence of dismemberment, but Bond (1996) argues that occasional examples of butchery may relate to the logistical practicalities of sacrificing and moving a large, heavy animal. Finds of bear phalanges, suggest the use of bear skins which may have been draped over or around the body, and which have been linked by Lucy (2000) to possible shamanic practice.

Animals sacrificed for early Anglo-Saxon cremation burials may have held religious associations for mourners relating to special traits linking the deceased and the chosen animal, and possibly facilitated or assisted their transformation to an ancestor state (Williams 2001). The horse played a significant

role in Norse mythology as the mount of gods and heroes, associated with Odin and Freyr, and linked to divination. They also had strong links between the living and the dead, and they are repeatedly referred to as funerary sacrifices in early Scandinavian literary sources (Davidson 1964; Williams 2001). In particular, the inclusion of horses in adult male burials, which also included martial objects, indicates that some special status was attributed to the deceased, but this also reflected the status of mourners (Lucy 2000; Williams 2001; Ravn 2003). Hamilakis (2008) has suggested that the act of animal sacrifice would have been an emotionally charged, multisensory act, which would have been mnemonically potent for spectators and participants.

Cremation burials of adult males had the highest frequency of animal offerings, while non-adults were rarely provisioned in this way (Williams 2001). Where animal offerings have been found in non-adult burials the most common species were sheep/goat, and pig bones, usually found in association with adolescents. Adult females were furnished with the broadest range of animal species, whilst mature adult males were the most likely to be buried with horse offerings, with these possibly representative of the deceased's own mount (Williams 2001; Ravn 2003).

Williams (2003) allows for the possibility that animal offerings may have also formed a part of the funerary rites associated with inhumation burials, but that the animal remains may have been disposed of elsewhere (perhaps as a feast for the mourners), and such were not deposited in the grave. Horses accompanied a small number of inhumation burials, and there were also burials of horses unaccompanied by human remains (Lucy 2000). Unaccompanied horse burials may be complete or partial animals, often located in proximity to, or in alignment with, adult male inhumations, such as mound 17 at Sutton Hoo, thus adding support to the interpretation that these horses had belonged to the deceased (Williams 2001, 2006).

### 5.5.7 Feasting accoutrements

Objects associated with feasting activities appear in early Anglo-Saxon burials (Lucy 2000; Williams 2006), these classes include glass drinking vessels, drinking horns, buckets and vessels made of pottery or wood (Haughton and Powelsland 1999; Hines and Bayliss 2013). Drinking played a significant role in the establishment and maintenance of social networks, as evidenced in *Beowulf* (Heaney 2000). At Spong Hill, Norfolk, there was a strong correlation between the inclusion of drinking, gaming pieces, horse bones and metal shears in burials of adult males (Ravn 2003). Drinking horns were restricted to high status adult male burials, such as the ship burial in mound one at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk and Taplow, Buckinghamshire. These objects were decorated with human heads which Brundle (2014) suggests reflect social networks and shared consumption.

Finds of bucket-shaped pendants in some female burials may also reference feasting practices, associated with the replenishing of alcoholic beverages (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). Worn about the neck or shoulder, likely sewn or wired to a leather strap, these pendants may have served an amuletic function (Dickinson 1999). However, other interpretations have been suggested, and these are discussed, below.

### 5.5.8 Containers/Boxes/Vessels

A recurrent theme in furnished female burials is the provision of a small bag or pouch constructed of leather, sheepskin or textile, worn by the (usually) left hip (Haughton and Powelsland 1999; Lucy 2000; Sherlock 2012). Some examples preserve ivory rings, an exotic material that derived from either elephant or fossilised mammoth ivory, which formed the mouth of the bag (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). These containers frequently include small objects, thought to be amulets, that perhaps indicative of special roles these women played within their communities (Dickinson 1999).

### 5.5.9 Weaving implements

While Brundle (2014) has argued that interlaced motifs in Anglo-Saxon art may have served apotropaic functions, she suggests a different meaning for the inclusion of weaving implements in burials. Citing several Early Medieval sources from Scandinavia and Western Europe more broadly, she argues that women played important roles in the creation and maintenance of community cohesion, and inter-community/international diplomacy. In line with this interpretation, Brundle (2014) also suggests that weaving implements were included in burials as objects metaphoric of women's 'weaving' of relationships and networks.

### 5.5.10 Ships and boats

The most elaborate late sixth to early seventh century burials from Sutton Hoo (Figure 7) and Snape in Suffolk included complete ships, buried beneath substantial mounds. This extravagant rite, known from just three burials, is replicated nowhere else in Anglo-Saxon Britain (Lucy 2000). Williams (2006, 135) suggests that these burials functioned as "ritual theatre" creating "multi-sensual" tableaux for display within the ships and burial chambers and that these would have had a profound mnemonic impact.

The famed ship burial from mound one at Sutton Hoo was highly elaborate. The deposition of the 27m long boat required the digging of a pit, 3.5m deep at its deepest and 28m long, and the whole burial was covered over with a mound, which dominated the view of any vessel travelling up the River Deben (Carver 1998; Williams 2006; Semple 2013). No bone preserved, due to the acidic soil conditions, so the interpretation of an adult male burial is based entirely on the grave goods (Carver 1998; Williams 2006). Signs



Figure 7: Sutton Hoo Ship burial under excavation in 1939 after Carver (2004).

of repairs to the ship indicate that the vessel had been serviceable, and was not constructed exclusively for the grave (Carver 1998). A chamber was constructed within the ship, and grave goods were displayed around the chamber, with some objects seemingly mounted on the walls (Carver 1998;

Williams 2006). The burial chamber was lavishly decorated with traces of brightly coloured textiles, and the prestige grave goods included highly decorated and reflective metal objects that would have caught the light, creating a sense of movement (Williams 2006; Brundle 2014).

While the burial of individuals within whole ships, under barrows was a highly restricted right, there were broader associations between boats or ships and burial in early Anglo-Saxon inhumation practices. Brookes (2007) observes that strakes from ships had been reused as coffin lids, and also as a bier, in eighth and ninth century Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials at Caistor-on-Sea, Norfolk, in a tradition which has come to be termed 'pseudo-boat-burial'. The practice also appears to have been employed in a small number of late Anglo-Saxon burials in Kent (Brookes 2007).

### 5.5.11 Religious/Secular

Religion and the secular world were closely entwined in the Anglo-Saxon world-view. Burial practices and grave goods communicated strong ideas about power and legitimacy as well as cosmological concerns. The decorative schemes of jewellery, dress accessories and martial objects clearly demonstrate the close connections between the spiritual and secular worlds (Dickinson 2005; Webster 2012; Brundle 2014). Colour was used to communicate status and power (both religious and secular), with red and purple employed in the decoration of high-status objects in particular (Webster 2012). Brooches, buckles, dress fittings and shield fittings were included in funerary assemblages. These were frequently decorated with animalistic motifs, and occasionally with human or human transformative motifs. These suggest cosmological beliefs connected with Norse mythology, potentially functioning as potent mnemonic objects (Dickinson 2005; Brundle 2014). Interlace decoration, which also frequently featured in Anglo-Saxon art may have served apotropaic functions, effectively 'binding' perceived supernatural dangers (Brundle 2014). The incorporation of Iron Age or Roman elements into jewellery may have also been seen to imbue the objects with ancestral powers (Sherlock 2012; Webster 2012). Bucket pendants (discussed above) have been found to retain traces of textile inside the buckets. While suggestions have been made that these pendants point to a role associated with the distribution of alcohol, it has also been inferred that they may relate to so-called 'thread boxes', which are magico-religious objects datable to the seventh century (Dickinson 1999).

The provision of grave goods was connected with the projection of social identity and power. The highest proportion of furnished graves date to the period of greatest political competition, when the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were forming (Williams 2006; Sherlock 2012; Semple 2013). Crawford (2004) explored the relationship between grave goods and votive practice, arguing that the deposition of prestige objects functioned as a form of conspicuous consumption, entwining votive practice with the accrual and projection of political power. Williams (2003) has highlighted the spiritual and mnemonic role of combs in cremation burials, and Ravn (2003) has underscored the link between hair and political power in Britain, and indeed across Germanic Europe in the early medieval period. There were regional as well as chronological differences in the religious and secular meanings of Anglo-Saxon objects. For example in the case of Bracteate pendants, these objects are believed to have projected the royal connections of female wearers in Kent (Behr 2010). However, in other regions, the meaning attached to bracteates appears to have been primarily religious and this class of object was included in votive deposits as well as burials.



## 5.6 Cemeteries and Deathscapes: Importance of Place and Use of the Landscape

During the fifth and sixth centuries there was a renewed interest in prehistoric and Roman monuments associated with elite burials, and this continued into the seventh century with a series of elite female mound-burials (Semple 2013). The conversion to Christianity saw a progressive change in the relationship with past monuments. No longer were these seen as places imbued with ancestral power, which could be drawn upon to enhance the power of, and transformation into ancestors of the newly departed. These pagan places came to be viewed as dangerous realms of the damned, their potency utilised to condemn individuals interred in execution cemeteries (Reynolds 2009).

In the early Anglo-Saxon period, engagement with past monuments formed an important sphere for the negotiation of memory, heritage, legitimacy and legacy (Williams 2006; Semple 2013). Viewsheds were important in the construction of deathscapes during this period. The dead were placed in highly visible places in the landscape, often overlooking settlements or large areas of territory. Routeways, entrances and territorial boundaries also formed important foci for burials during the seventh century AD when the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were forming in Britain (Semple 2013). The placement of the burial mounds made the dead visible in the daily lives of the local inhabitants, and at the same time, the dead could also be seen to view the living from their vantage point in the landscape.

The re-engagement with prehistoric monuments continued across the seventh century AD throughout Britain (Williams 1998). Anglo-Saxon burials have been found concentrated directly around, making explicit reference to, elaborating upon or emulating pre-existing monuments including: Neolithic long barrows and henge monuments; Bronze Age round barrows and linear earth works; Iron Age square barrows and hillforts; and Roman structures including villas, bathhouses, temples and mausolea, roads and forts (Williams 1998). This engagement also included the insertion of new Anglo-Saxon burials into Bronze Age and Iron Age barrows (Lucy 2000; Williams 2006; Semple 2013). During his excavation of the Iron Age Arras Culture cemeteries at Rudston/Burton Fleming, East Yorkshire Stead (1991), noted the placement of later Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials into some of the Iron Age barrows. This practice has also been observed during recent excavations at Pocklington (Ware 2017). At Street House, Loftus, North-East Yorkshire a wealthy seventh century AD Anglo Saxon inhumation cemetery was laid out inside an Iron Age enclosure, with some of the burials concentrated on the locus of an Iron Age roundhouse (Sherlock 2012).

Reuse of ancient monuments for burial was not unique to Britain during this period, as similar practices are observed in Ireland, Scandinavia, northern Germany and Gaul (Semple 2013). In Spain and Italy there is also clear evidence for the re-use of Roman monuments, indicative of a widespread concern with linking present communities to the past, which was negotiated through pre-existing monuments. Williams (1998, 2006) and Semple (2013) link this practice to the volatile political environment across Europe, which in Britain saw the formation of new kingdoms, vying for territorial control and legitimacy.

Following the broad conversion of Britain to Christianity by the ninth century, there was a significant change in the perception and use of ancient monuments in the construction of deathscapes. Prehistoric landmarks had previously been utilised to underscore concepts of belonging and legitimacy, imbuing the deceased with their ancestral power. In an increasingly Christianised Anglo-Saxon world-

view these places took on new meaning, and became deathscapes of the damned: utilised as execution cemeteries, ensuring ongoing punishment in the afterlife (Reynolds 2009). Formerly foci for elite burials their significance was inverted to receive only the socially outcast.

With the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity there was a slow shift away from burial in ancestral places as the new religion forged new connections with the landscape. While many churches were sited in new locations, the underlying concerns that influenced choice of place appear to have been similar to the identification of liminal or sacred sites in pre-conversion cosmologies. Emphasis was placed on springs, high places, routeways and boundaries as well as viewsheds, which included pre-existing monuments (Pluskowski and Patrick 2003). Within churchyards, burials were generally neatly laid out; however, there was strong competition to be buried *ad sanctos* (Beresford and Hurst 1990; Williams 2006). Thus, there remained a desire to link the memory of the deceased with a sacred place, replacing the previous need to associate with, or to appropriate ancestral places.

During the later Anglo-Saxon period standing monuments are visible in the form of gravestones. The lack of intercutting in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries indicates that grave markers of wood or other perishable materials were also used, but these have not survived in the archaeological record (Haughton and Powelsland 1999). Anglo-Saxon sculpted funerary monuments appear to be derived from Romano-British sarcophagus forms (Cramp 1984). Anglo-Saxon sculpture is closely tied to the adoption of Christianity, and the earliest sculptures are connected with ecclesiastical centres, particularly in the form of standing crosses. From the seventh century, and increasingly from the ninth century, grave slabs and gravestones commemorated the social elite. The Christian cross was the most common motif on these monuments, which were erected or displayed in churches or churchyards (Hawkes 1999). Stones could bear Latin or Runic inscriptions, some of which appear to have been retouched and maintained over a period of time.

## 6. Medieval Burial Practices

The Medieval period begins with the Norman Conquest and concludes with the English Reformation in the sixteenth century. Little changed at the graveside. Supine, extended inhumation with the head to the west continued as the dominant practice throughout the medieval period (Zadora-Rio 2003). However, despite this seeming homogeneity in burial practices, real attitudinal changes took place. A broad range of historical sources, including wills, liturgical documents, lists of the names of the departed, and instruction manuals aimed at achieving a good death, provide evidence of funerary practice and contemporary concerns around dying and remembrance (Daniell 1997). Christian ideas about good death and the need for intercessory prayer permeate the period, alongside anxieties about final judgement and resurrection (Horrox 1999). The social elite sought to ensure that they would be remembered, and were active agents in the development of their own memorialisation strategies (Roffey 2008). Physical monuments clamoured for attention, and guilds and fraternities took on important roles in securing the remembrance and intercession of the living on behalf of dead members. The Church took on a dominant role and remembrance became industrialised and competitive (Binski 1996).

## 6.1 *Funerary Rites*

Medieval Christianity “placed the human body at the centre for its speculations about identity and faith” and relationships between the living, the dead and eternity were negotiated through the physical body (Binski 1996, 21). As during the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, treatment of the body in the medieval world included a period of display, and careful preparation prior to the performance of funerary rites. Historical accounts indicate that on the night of the death, the body was the subject of a candle-lit vigil attended by the immediate family, in the home (Horrox 1999). The period between death and burial was a liminal one, in which the body and soul were vulnerable to potentially dangerous supernatural forces, requiring special treatment and care (Daniell 1997). The body was washed with warm water before being wrapped in a shroud or winding sheet (Horrox 1999). A more elaborate and powerful alternative to washing was the anointing of the body with oils and essences in the physically transformative rite of unction (Binski 1996).

Shroud cloth was usually linen, wrapped tightly around the body and covering the face, a task generally performed by women, who may have been members of the family, or specifically contracted to perform this duty (Daniell 1997; Hadley 2001). Shrouded burial appears to have been more common in Britain than on the continent, where the social elite preferred burial in special funerary robes (Hadley 2001).

Throughout the medieval period there was a concern with preventing bodily decay (Daniell and Thompson 1999). In the early medieval period there was a general belief that the body must remain intact in anticipation of resurrection on the Day of Judgement. However, following the formal recognition of the role of Purgatory in the thirteenth century, emphasis on the preservation of the physical body declined, with a corresponding increase in focus on the salvation of the immortal soul (Roffey 2008). This position underwent a reversal by the beginning of the fourteenth century when the practice of dividing up the body for separate burial was outlawed by Boniface VIII under threat of excommunication. An allowance was made that a body could be exhumed and relocated after one year, by which time the flesh was expected to have decomposed (Horrox 1999).

To address concerns about the decay of the physical body, various embalming techniques could be employed for the social elite, particularly if the body would need to be transported over some distance (Daniell 1997; Hadley 2001). Embalming practices for those who would not be transported or displayed for any length of time, could involve removal of the viscera via a long abdominal incision. The cavity was washed with “vinegar before packing it with salt and spices” (Horrox 1999, 99). The body was wrapped in linen treated with wax (cerecloth), and sometimes dressed in clothes, as worn in life (Daniell 1997).

For those expected to be transported long distances, the body could be dismembered and boiled so that the bones could be easily separated (Horrox 1999). The flesh and viscera would be buried on consecrated ground close to the site of death, with the bones being transported to the final burial location. For the elite, the burial of the heart could take on special meaning, and could be singled out in wills for separate burial in a place that was significant to the deceased. Such burials sometimes had separate memorial monuments. Small monuments thought to have been for children may in fact be monuments indicating the interment of hearts (Horrox 1999). The separate burial of the heart in a

place of significance is a practice that continued into the early modern period, and in rare instances, in the modern era (Gittings and Walter 2010).

Our knowledge of funerary practice during the medieval period is supplemented by written sources, including wills and artistic representations, in addition to the archaeological evidence, though each has its limitations. Wills are problematic documents as they are “declarations of intent” rather than evidence of execution (Roffey 2008, 26). Nevertheless, they offer insights into the kinds of practices people desired for themselves, and are likely reflective of practices they observed at the funerals of others. Wills were primarily drafted by the nobility, clerical and mercantile classes, although this practice spread to literate members of the peasant classes by the late fifteenth century (Hadley 2001). Illuminated manuscripts from Britain and across Western Europe offer hundreds of representations of funerary rituals in varying degrees of realism (Fiero 1984). Artistic representations generally depict the funerals of the social elite, rather than the rites accorded to the majority of the population. Similarly, literary accounts of funerals recount the rites performed for members of the clergy, nobility and royalty rather than non-elite laity (Daniell 1997; Hadley 2001). Yet, the overall combination of these sources, when combined with the archaeological evidence, indicates that the process of dying, and the funerary rites that followed, involved several distinct stages.

Much of medieval Christian funerary practice was derived from continental Late Roman tradition (Toynbee 1996; Daniell 1997). As in Roman times, when death was anticipated the family would attend the dying person (Horrox 1999). For the largely Christian population, it was also important that a priest should be present and offer the sacrament and last rites, hear confession, and aid them in their spiritual preparations for death (Daniell 1997). Binski (1996) proposes a link between the offering of communion to the dying and the pagan practice of placing coins in the mouths of the deceased to pay the ferryman.

Horrox (1999) suggests that one of the most significant impacts of the plague, which arrived in the mid-fourteenth century, was a reluctance amongst clergy and family members to attend the dying for fear of contracting the sickness. Fiero (1984) similarly argues that many common death rituals were suspended during the plague crisis. People feared dying alone. Individuals were encouraged to make preparations as best they could, and lay persons could hear deathbed confessions in the absence of a priest (Horrox 1999). There was an art to dying well, and by the fifteenth century the *ars moriendi* had become quasi-formalised, particularly among the social elite. This was exhorted through numerous manuals, which featured emphases on personal piety and a lack of fear (Binski 1996; Daniell 1997; Morgan 1999). For many among the literate classes writing a will formed part of the dying process, and these documents frequently included provisions aimed at securing remembrance through endowments and bequests (Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999; Roffey 2008).

Immediately following death was the vigil or wake, in which family members, or fellow clergy if in a monastic setting, attended to the deceased. For those who had been members of a guild, representatives of the guild were tasked to attend. Attendees kept a candle-lit vigil, reciting psalms (Daniell 1997). For the lay community the wake appears to be the continuation of a pagan tradition, which was tolerated by the church, although there are references to disapproval of behaviour during the vigils, which could involve ribald humour (Horrox 1999). After a night spent in vigil, the body was typically transported to the churchyard for burial services.



Funeral processions (Figure 8) included pallbearers, and were led by individuals carrying the cross, and a lamp or taper (Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999). The choice of (almost exclusively male) pallbearers could reflect social status by calling upon prominent men in the family or community, or serve as an act of humility through the commissioning of paupers (Daniell 1997). When the final burial location was some distance from the place of death, the funeral procession could take days, and be rested overnight at churches along the procession route. For instance, the funeral procession of Queen Eleanor in 1290, from Lincoln to Westminster Abbey, took 12 days (Roffey 2008). Edward I later erected 12 crosses in remembrance of Queen Eleanor, one at each of the locations the funeral procession stopped en-route to Westminster Abbey (Roffey 2008). These formed part of a series of memorials to the queen, whose viscera were interred at the cathedral in Lincoln, her body in Westminster cathedral, and her heart at London's Dominican friary, with each place marked by a separate commemorative monument (Hadley 2001).



Figure 8: Funeral procession of Jean II from an illustrated medieval manuscript c.1410, in the Public Domain.

While the modern hearse prominently displays the coffin, in medieval times the hearse was constructed of heavy cloth, which shielded the shrouded or coffined corpse from view (Horrox 1999). This may form a continuation of the tradition of staged display and concealment, which, as Williams (2006) observed, played a prominent role in earlier Anglo-Saxon funerals. For the wealthy, coffins and hearses could be commissioned for individual burials, while for the general public these accoutrements could be borrowed or leased from the church for use in funeral services (Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999)(Figure 9). Domestic chests could be repurposed as coffins, as evidenced at the Hospital at St. Mary Magdalen, Partney, Lincolnshire, and Fishergate, York (Atkins and Popescu 2010). From the thirteenth century it was common to transport the body to the graveside in a coffin, where the shrouded body would be removed from the coffin and interred, uncoffined, in the grave (Binski 1996). Narrow grave dimensions and the position of bones within medieval burials indicate that uncoffined, shrouded burial was widely practiced (Hadley 2001).



**Figure 9: Parish coffin (on bier), Howden Minster, East Yorkshire. This example dates to the seventeenth century (1664), but similar coffins were in use across Britain throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Photograph by Yvonne Inall.**

Surviving wills sometimes specify aspects of funeral arrangements, including gifts to official mourners. These gifts often included items of clothing, as outlined in the will of Joanne Hungerford (dated 1411) which stipulated the clothing of twelve women paupers “in russet with linen hoods” (Roffey 2008, 21). When repeatedly worn these garments would have had the effect of recalling the memory of both the funeral service and of the deceased individual (Roffey 2008). The provision of robes to mourners could



be substantial. Records for the 1489 funeral of Earl of Northumberland included the preparation of robes of wool and silk velvet, amounting to over 2,000 yards of cloth, all died black for the occasion (Taylor 1983). The wearing of black attire is noted from the late thirteenth century, beginning with the social elite, and spreading to the wider population over the following century (Horrox 1999). Breaks with this tradition could signal the social identity of the deceased, with some maidens' funerals recorded as featuring female pallbearers dressed in white, in recognition of the purity of the deceased (Gittings 1999). Clothing formed an important vehicle for communicating the social status of the deceased and was used to project mourners' grief (Daniell 1997).

Light was a recurrent feature in funeral practices, and wills frequently specified the lighting of candles or torches, placed around the body during the vigil, again specified in the will of Joanne Hungerford, and carried in funerary processions (Horrox 1999; Roffey 2008). Postles (1999) argues that light formed a popular expression of lay piety during the medieval period, and that during the late twelfth century, donations related to lighting shifted from gifts given to the church during life to bequests to be enacted after the benefactor's death.

Sound also played a prominent role in funerary processions, with the repeated ringing of a hand-held bell and the recitation or singing of psalms (Binski 1996; Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999). This auditory dimension formed part of a greater sequence of aural cues around dying, death and remembrance. When the sacrament was brought to a dying person, it was attended by chanting and the ringing of hand-held bells (Horrox 1999). Funeral mass included further auditory performance, and the enactment of treading and other commemorative liturgical elements created repeated auditory mnemonics through which the deceased could be remembered. These formed an important part of the daily religious lives of medieval communities (Roffey 2008).

Behaviour at funerals followed particular conventions. While it was permissible to exhibit grief through mode of dress and the adoption of a sombre attitude, the performance of bodily displays of grief were seen as undermining the Christian message of salvation (Horrox 1999). The performance of grief was also strongly gendered, and outward displays such as openly weeping or tearing at their hair were acceptable for women only, with female grief forming a recurrent motif in artistic representations of funerals (Binski 1996).

For elite funerals, a dinner formed an important part of the rituals, and this could include gifts, or a dole of food or alcohol to the wider community. This often emphasised feeding of the poor as an intercessory act, thereby performing good works on behalf of the deceased (Horrox 1999; Hadley 2001).

Thus, the medieval funeral was a multi-sensory experience, with light, sound, the distribution of gifts, and the use of visual and bodily performance all combined to construct a memorable event, which would communicate the role, and status the deceased individual had held in life, whilst also offering mourners strong cues for future remembrance. As vehicles for remembrance, and opportunities for the projection of social status and influence, funerals became ripe for competitive displays. By the fifteenth century the desire amongst the upwardly mobile mercantile classes to enhance their social standing through the provision of lavish funerary displays was limited by strict sumptuary laws (Taylor 1983).

The grave was commonly dug during the funeral service, and, consequently, medieval graves were frequently less than 1m deep (Horrox 1999). This practice was suspended during the fourteenth century plague crisis in London, where the plague pits were dug in advance (Hawkins 1990).

Prayer played an increasingly significant role in funeral practice. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, their length and complexity grew (Fiero 1984). Masses for the dying were offered in parish churches in anticipation of death (Daniell 1997). Prayers following death took the form of the Office of the Dead, which included vespers on the night before burial, followed by requiem mass, lauds and matins on the day of the funeral (Binski 1996; Horrox 1999). A series of subsequent chantry masses could follow, numbering anywhere from the *Gregorian* 'trental' of a mass each day for 30 days, to the performance of literally thousands of masses for the social elite (Roffey 2008). Annual prayers and recitations of lists of names of the departed, usually said at Easter, would offer remembrance and intercession for the deceased for years after death (Roffey 2008). Binski (1996, 23) observed a critical distinction between the role of prayer in pagan memorialisation and that of the Christian world: "pagans prayed *to* the dead...Christians...prayed *for* the dead" [original emphasis].

## 6.2 Traumatic/problematic death

Traumatic or problematic deaths continued to be treated differently throughout the middle ages. In an era when much of life was perceived as preparation for one's eventual demise, sudden death was particularly feared (Daniell 1997; Roffey 2008). The bodies of excommunicants, the unbaptised and non-Christians could not be buried in consecrated ground (Binski 1996). Suicide was especially problematic, being described by Horrox (1999, 98) as "a sort of superfelony", subjected to proscriptions on churchyard burial, and sometimes to post-mortem punishments such as a stake through the heart or burial at crossroads. This could create obvious tensions for mourners, and despite the official position that suicides were damned, there was some allowance within the church that the souls of suicides could be prayed for, and burial was sometimes permitted on the northern side of the churchyard, "an area considered inauspicious" (Daniell 1997; Gittings 1999, 150). Violent death and death in childbirth were also problematic, and many churches had proscriptions on bringing the bodies of such persons inside the church for fear that their blood would pollute the sacred structure (Horrox 1999).

Unbaptised infants could create real tensions for bereaved parents, as church doctrine at this time saw their deceased offspring as disposable (Morgan 1999). As observed for the Late Anglo-Saxon period, the (seemingly unsanctioned) practice of eavesdrip burials for neonates and infants served as a means by which bereaved parents may have sought to defy religious doctrine or convention (Chadwick 2012; Craig-Atkins 2014).

Famine, plague and disease were recurrent features during the medieval period, in particular the Great Famine of 1315 and the Black Death in 1348-1349, which resulted in higher than usual rates of mortality. In larger urban centres, the Black Death was especially problematic. In London, at the height of the epidemic in April 1349, it is estimated that there were roughly 200 deaths per day (Antoine and Hillson 2004). While most plague victims would have been accommodated in regular churchyard burials, the crisis of 1349 resulted in the designation of new cemeteries, specifically to receive those who died of plague (Hawkins 1990). At the plague cemetery at East Smithfield, London it is clear that

a large number of individuals were buried in short space of time. There is also evidence that the bodies were treated with some care, placed in individual graves, or large trenches in extended supine position, with the head to the west, in accordance with Christian burial tradition (Hawkins 1990). Individuals could be buried in coffins or shrouds, and ash deposits were associated with some burials, both within the separate graves and the more concentrated mass burial trenches (Hawkins 1990). Daniell (1997) highlights that the dying, particularly members of the clergy and some devout laity, could be laid on a bed of sack-cloth and ash, with the ash laid out in the form of a crucifix as a final act of penitence. As such, in archaeological terms, the excavation of ash deposits in burials may relate to this practice (Roffey 2008).

The impact of the plague on funerary practice and memorialisation was not immediately felt. The initial outbreak of plague, which was pandemic across Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, killed perhaps half of the population in some communities (Hawkins 1990). It was followed by recurrent epidemics which continued throughout the rest of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Fiero 1984; Morgan 1999). Death was always close, and claimed victims seemingly at will. This was manifested in literary, liturgical and artistic displays of *memento mori*, which were still prominent in funerary sculpture of the sixteenth century (Daniell 1997; Roffey 2008). While a direct link between the plague and *memento mori* of this nature has been disputed, it is clear that there were distinct attitudinal changes in the generations following the arrival of the plague (Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999). The increased frequency of depictions of motifs such as the Three Living and the Three Dead, and the Dance of Death are most likely a reflection of the amplified sense of imminent and unexpected death brought about by the plague (Hadley 2001).

Sufferers of leprosy were generally excluded from society, and they ultimately congregated in leper colonies. These individuals were often perceived as socially dead long before their physical death, and some were accorded funerary rites prior to entering leper communities (Morgan 1999). These rites could involve the 'afflicted' person standing in an open grave, while earth was cast over them, mimicking burial (Binski 1996). The performance of such rites of separation would allow those close to the sick person to remember them in a state of relative health, rather than ravaged by a progressive disease. Excavations of the *leprosaria* at St Mary Magdalen, Winchester indicate that, within leper colonies, burial practices were generally consistent with those of contemporary churchyard cemeteries throughout Britain, with cofined or uncofined interment in the extended supine position, with the head to the west (Christie *et al.* 2010). However, the burials were located in a discrete cluster on the northern side of the cemetery (Roffey 2012), which, as already noted, Gittings (1999, 150) identified as "inauspicious".

Criminals, in particular, were singled out for different treatment in death. The Anglo-Saxon practice of exposure and dismemberment continued throughout the medieval period (Daniell and Thompson 1999). Prominent display of the mutilated bodies of lawbreakers and traitors highlighted that their transgressions had consequences beyond the mortal world. The antithesis of *ad sanctos*, their burials were *ad paganos* – literally 'pagan': away from the churchyards and frequently in association with pre-Christian monuments.

### 6.3 *Non-Christian death*

One of the greatest threats of excommunication was the prohibition of Christian burial rites on consecrated ground, and the consequent exclusion from the Resurrection (Binski 1996). Heretics and excommunicants could also be subjected to post-mortem physical violations and were considered to be both physically and spiritually dead (Binski 1996). Individuals from such ostracised groups could be buried in discrete burial grounds away from churchyard cemeteries, and there has been some suggestion that a discrete group of burials at Jewbury Jewish cemetery in York is indicative of such practice (Hadley 2001).

Jews, as the only visible non-Christian group in medieval Britain, were also excluded from Christian cemeteries. This was a minority community with only ten Jewish Cemeteries identified for the medieval period in Britain, three of which have been subjected to archaeological study (Daniell 1997). The largest of these is Jewbury cemetery in York, which yielded over 400 burials (McComish 2000). The cemetery was extramural, in accordance with legislation passed in 1177, and was only in use for just over a century, terminating with the expulsion of Jews in 1290 (McComish 2000). As one of a very limited number of Jewish cemeteries in existence at this time, the catchment for Jewbury extended to Lincoln and Stamford (Daniell 1997). The cemetery was tightly packed, yet, intercutting of graves was carefully avoided. This was in marked contrast to the contemporary Christian cemeteries in York, where intercutting and disturbance of earlier burials was common (McComish 2000; Hadley 2001; Dawes and Magilton 1980). No grave markers have been recovered from the cemetery at Jewbury, although fragments of medieval Jewish gravestones have been recovered from London, Cambridge and Bristol (McComish 2000), and the lack of intercutting indicates that graves were marked in some way (Hadley 2001).

The orientation of Jewish burials differed from the west-east standard of medieval Christian burial. At Jewbury, burials were oriented with the head to the south-west although there was no specific rule on appropriate orientation in Jewish doctrine (McComish 2000). In other aspects, burial practice was similar to Christian burial with the extended supine position most common, and there is evidence for the use of shrouds and coffins in many burials (McComish 2000). An absence of children in the cemetery indicates they were buried elsewhere, or were subjected to different funerary treatment (Daniell 1997).

### 6.4 *Grave Goods*

By the medieval period Christian doctrine rendered grave goods largely unnecessary. However, prominent members of the clergy could be buried with the signs of their rank and status (Beresford and Hurst 1990; Daniell 1997). Lay persons could also be buried with a pilgrim's staff as an indicator of piety (Hadley 2001; Williams 2006). The inclusion of amulets and apotropaic objects is a practice repeated across time, persisting into the medieval period and likened by Gilchrist (2008, 121) to "the processes of 'hybridity' and 'creolisation'" in diasporas as the old forms of popular magic were absorbed into the emerging Christian culture. Perceptions of a journey to the afterlife, which needed to be equipped for and negotiated, continued. The physical body remained in the grave, while the soul traversed Purgatory en-route to heaven, an arduous journey, which could be hastened, and possibly ameliorated, through the intercessions of the living (Roffey 2008). There was still a need to make

provisions for the departed, to see them safely to their final destination, as there had been in the pre-Christian period, it was merely the nature of that provision which changed.

The practise of ritual destruction of objects continued in a limited way. A burial from the priory at St Andrew, York included a broken seal, which appears to have been deliberately broken with part of the seal placed in the burial and the remainder retained (Hadley 2001). Votive deposition in rivers may also have continued into the medieval period, with martial objects recovered from the River Witham, Lincolnshire, a place which had been the focus of deposition from the Neolithic period right through until the middle ages (Field and Parker Pearson 2003). River deposits may have had funerary associations, and could have been performed as acts of remembrance (Hadley 2001).

## **6.5 Religious/Secular**

The majority of the British population were Christian by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, and the church played an increasingly influential role in the performance of funerary rites and memorialisation throughout the medieval period. No aspect of church doctrine was perhaps as influential as the promulgation of the doctrine on Purgatory at the second council of Lyon in 1274 (Horrox 1999).

### **6.5.1 Purgatory and Chantry Provision**

Notions of purgatory may have evolved from a range of pagan afterlife concepts, emerging from the Anglo-Saxon world (Hadley 2001; Roffey 2008). The concept that each individual soul must endure a time in Purgatory on the journey to heaven, which could be hastened by intercessory prayers, drove an ongoing need to be remembered, this was contrasted against repeated visual and liturgical admonitions about the fate of the forgotten (Fiero 1984; Binski 1996). The result was an innovative diversification of forms of remembrance which included the establishment of chantry chapels and bequests of land, money, objects, and the staging of public funerals with feasting and gifts to mourners, with these serving as mementos or reminders of the deceased (Roffey 2008). Guilds and parish fraternities came to serve as potent agents of intercession, memorialising individual members and maintaining registers to ensure the dead would not be forgotten (Horrox 1999). Chantry services and endowments thus form the prism through which many aspects of medieval memorialisation can be viewed.

Chantries could take a number of forms ranging from the use of existing altar structures for the performance of chantry services to the construction of entire chapels and hospitals dedicated to chantry intercession on behalf of the souls of specific individuals or groups (Roffey 2008). For poor laypersons, the charnel house may have functioned as a form of chantry, and a hub for acts of penitence and confession (Crangle 2013). One of the simplest forms of chantry bequest was the provision of candles or lights to the church (Hadley 2001). Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular, the provision of lights was a common form of pious expression, and one of the most inexpensive vehicles for performing intercessory acts of remembrance (Postles 1999). The use of light in the performance of funerary ritual also occurred during the Romano-British period, and has been a recurrent theme in religious rituals across time and cultures (Toynbee 1996; Bille and Sørensen 2007). One of the more complex forms of chantry, using light, was the provision of stained glass

windows. Such scenes often depicted the patron in prayer, as warriors of Christ, or in the performance of pious or penitential acts (Hadley 2001; Daunton 2009).

The function of chantry monuments, as a means of securing intercessory prayer, meant that they were designed to intrude on the minds of viewers, or persons moving through religious space (Roffey 2008). Chantries could be ornately decorated, and often included motifs, which identified family lineages, guild or other mercantile affiliations, and allusions to the industry of their patron (Roffey 2008). They thus included a range of both religious and secular motifs and played an important role in preserving the memory of both the religious and secular aspects of the life of the individual. In addition to the physical construction of chantry structures and the use of objects in the form of gifts and bequests, new liturgies were drafted and came to form important performative components in the religious experiences of parishioners, offering opportunities for collective remembrance (Roffey 2008).

Battlefield chantry chapels for Towton and Shrewsbury offered prayers and memorialisation specifically designed for those who died in combat (Roffey 2008). Richard III established the chantry chapel that was set up in remembrance of the battle of Towton during his time as the Duke of Gloucester (Orme 1996). The erection of chantry chapels following specific battles intersects with a wider practice of commemorating battles and the sanctification of battlefields through the erection of religious icons or the construction of religious buildings (Atherton and Morgan 2011).

By the late medieval period, the burden of caring for the dead, through the provision of chantry masses, endowments and bequests, was substantial (Binski 1996). Vast sums of wealth and tracts of land were bequeathed to the church. From as early as 1279, the Statutes of Mortmain stated that a royal licence was required to found a chantry (Roffey 2008). The legislation was intended to limit the transfer of land to the Church. However, by the time chantries were banned in 1547 more than 2,000 licences had been issued (Roffey 2008). Like wills, licences are problematic documents, as the licenced chantry may never have been constructed. Similarly, the prospect of unlicensed chantries makes the correlation between licencing and construction difficult to disentangle.

The business of praying for the dead was a full time industry. For example, by the end of the thirteenth century approximately 7,000 requiem masses performed each year by monks in Durham alone (Fiero 1984). In addition, by the fifteenth century approximately 75 percent of London's clergy were chantry priests, employed solely to remember and pray for the souls of the dead (Roffey 2008). Binski (1996, 32-3) summarises the long-term impact of the relationship between clergy, chantry services and the lay population, stating that:

*“In essence this clerical domination of the rituals of remembrance amounted to an appropriation of rites by a class of specialized technocrats of death, and for the remainder of the Middle Ages this renunciation by society of rituals which formerly belonged within the family itself, to an impersonal group, remained normal. The modern lay alienation from death and its rituals stems in part from this development.”*

In the early decades of the sixteenth century the practice of praying for the dead appears to have been in decline (Morgan 1999). The Reformation tapped into this waning interest and formally curtailed



chantry practice with strict guidelines on funerary practice and memorialisation, which saw secular ideas about dying pushed to the fore (Gittings 1999).

### 6.5.2 Guilds and Fraternities

For those outside of the social elite, funeral and chantry provisions could be accommodated through guild membership. As in the Roman period, guilds and fraternities performed numerous functions, including attendance at the vigil following the death of an individual (Toynbee 1996; Horrox 1999). The setting out of candles around the body which were kept alight until the funeral, and the provision of a hearse, were duties commonly fulfilled by guilds (Hadley 2001). Guilds often displayed banners and performed public funeral duties, which drew attention to the deceased, ensuring that they would be remembered (Daniell 1997; Morgan 1999).

Many guilds specified ongoing acts of remembrance for their members, including keeping lists of their dead, which would be read annually at Easter mass, and wealthier guilds employed their own chantry priests (Roffey 2008). Guilds could also facilitate pilgrimages, commissioned on behalf of members, with records of pilgrimages undertaken to Jerusalem, Compostela and Rome (Hadley 2001).

Guild monuments also offered opportunities for competitive acts of remembrance, and these served to reinforce group membership. At Beverley Minster, various guilds constructed monuments, or funded alterations to specific parts of the structure, creating strong associations between the Minster, the guild and the remembrance of departed guild members (Roffey 2008).

### 6.5.3 The Role of Saints: Relics and Intercessory Agents

Throughout the medieval period saints acted as powerful intercessors on behalf of the dead. Whilst there were only a limited number of saints recognised by Rome, in Britain more individuals were unofficially venerated as saints (Hadley 2001). The desire for *ad sanctos* burial, which developed during the Anglo-Saxon period was incorporated into medieval chantry practices, and strong desires were expressed in wills to be buried close to the relics of saints housed in churches (Roffey 2008).

The remains of saints (both sanctioned and unsanctioned) could be highly mobile, with these being deposited in multiple contexts within the same church, and/or in geographically distinct locations (Hadley 2001). While acts of dismemberment were generally the preserve of criminals and social outcasts, saints formed a notable exception, as their remains were frequently disarticulated. Part of the saint was taken as representative of the whole, and seen as equally efficacious (Binski 1996). The physical remains of saints were seen as holding intercessory, even miraculous powers, and saints' relics became central to pilgrimages and wills could specify a pilgrimage be taken on behalf of the deceased as an act of intercession (Hadley 2001).

## 6.6 Cemeteries and Deathscapes

While churchyard burial predominated throughout the medieval period, there was no clear Christian mandate that burials should be sited in proximity to churches (Geake 2003; Zadora-Rio 2003). Certainly, field cemeteries continued into the tenth century (Astill 2009), but with the rising prominence of the Church, the mnemonic potency that had previously resided with the ancestors shifted to the church thus drawing the placement of the dead with it (Williams 2006). Wills frequently

stated the desired place of burial, and this was often *ad sanctos*: within, or in proximity to, a church structure. In Hull, 200 of 355 preserved wills dated between 1400 and 1529 specified burial within Holy Trinity and a further 64 identified St Mary Lowgate as the favoured location for burial (Hadley 2001). The desire to be buried close to loved ones was also expressed in wills. The 1448 will of William Styward, stated his wish to be buried within the choir of St Helen-on-the-Walls, York under the same grave slab that marked the place of his mother's grave, combining *ad sanctos* burial with the creation of an intergenerational space of remembrance (Hadley 2001).

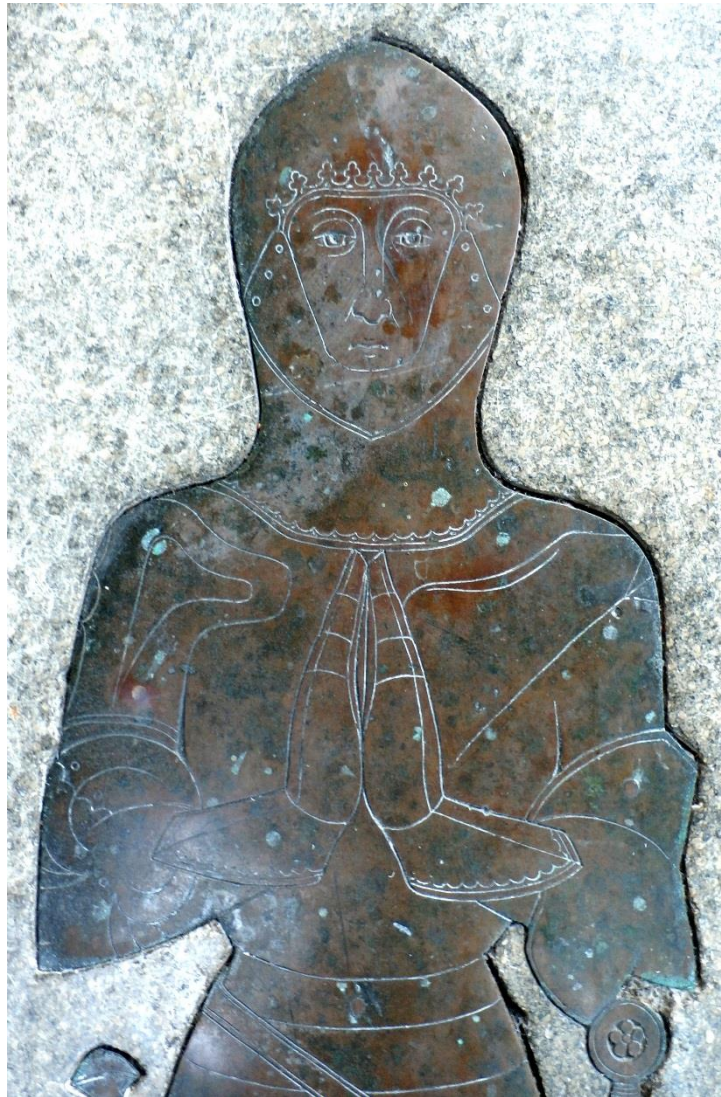
Churchyards offered limited space for burial, and many were in use over extended periods. For many of the laity, burials were unmarked, and while there is evidence to support attempts to avoid intercutting graves, it is clear that earlier graves were sometimes disturbed (Dawes and Magilton 1980; Beresford and Hurst 1990; Zadora-Rio 2003). When bones were unearthed in this way it was customary to remove them from the burial ground and deposit them in a charnel house (Hadley 2001). Secondary burial practices could also involve the exhumation of bones and their removal to the charnel house (Binski 1996). Four charnel pits were recorded at the St. Helen-on-the-Walls cemetery in York (Dawes and Magilton 1980). Crangle (2013) has identified more than 60 charnel houses datable to the medieval period in England. There was variable concern about total collection of bone, as the late medieval concepts relating to body and soul shifted between the need to maintain bodily integrity and the belief that body and soul would be made whole and reunited at the time of resurrection (Astill 2009; Binski 1996; Williams 2006). Following the Reformation, many charnel houses were appropriated by "prominent local families" as private burial vaults (Daniell 1997, 194). Consequently, very few charnel houses survive intact, and little research has been conducted into their form and wider social functions (Crangle 2013).

## 6.7 Memorials and Mementos

For the majority of the medieval population unmarked churchyard burial meant the absence of any lasting funeral monument. Memorials and acts of remembrance were personal and impermanent, such as the provision of lights or the recitation of prayers or lists of names, as discussed above (Hadley 2001). For the wealthy and the social elite, however, physical memorials abounded. Strategies for memorialisation were diverse, competitive, and again subject to strict religious, legal and social controls (Taylor 1983; Hadley 2001; Roffey 2008). The burden of chantry provision was very real, and for those outside of the social elite, the exclusion or unaffordability of many expressions of remembrance must have reinforced their place in the social hierarchy.

From the eleventh century stone grave slabs, which had first appeared in the Anglo-Saxon period, began to feature figured decoration. Anglo-Saxon slabs principally featured simple, incised decoration with crosses or openwork motifs (Trivick 1969; Cramp 1984). The cross continued as a prominent motif, sometimes accompanied by other icons indicative of social roles, such as chalices on the slabs of clerics, swords as indicators of elite male power and shears that may have represented female connections to weaving, both literally and figuratively, within communities (Hadley 2001; Brundle 2014). Early examples of figured decoration included religious figures or scenes, such as the crucifixion, as depicted on a slab from Llaveynoe, Herefordshire, which is dated to the tenth or eleventh century (Trivick 1969). By the thirteenth century some of these monumental grave covers were made of metal (Figure 10). Known as monumental brasses, their incised decoration included a range of stock figures, matched by

contemporary stone effigies in relief (Downing 2010). The earliest examples were made for the ecclesiastical community, but their use was taken up by lay persons from the early fourteenth century (Hadley 2001). Figured motifs included knights, abbots and bishops, maidens and matrons, with only those of royalty and the wealthiest patrons executed as accurate representations of the deceased. Joint memorials appeared for husbands and wives (Daniell and Thompson 1999).



**Figure 10: Monumental brass effigy of William Wadham (d.1452), Wadham Chapel (north transept), St Mary's Church, Ilminster, Somerset, in the Public Domain.**

A growing emphasis on physical decay from the fourteenth century onwards, was contrasted against spiritual salvation, and reached its most visible expression through the construction of cadaver tombs; sculpted monuments featuring a rendering of the deceased in serene repose juxtaposed against a graphic representation of their form in an advanced state of physical decay (King 1984; Morgan 1999). The skeletal features and prominence of vermin on tombs such as those dedicated to the Bishops Fox and Gardiner at Winchester Cathedral served as powerful *memento mori* (Roffey 2008).

The artistic motifs employed on chantry monuments, slabs, brasses, cadaver tombs and gravestones, and in stained glass, impressed upon the viewer the social role, status and piety of the deceased. Many chantry monuments were constructed during life and were regularly attended by their patrons prior to death (Roffey 2008). The form of monument could demonstrate the close ties between individuals in life, using similar, select styles such as the cadaver tomb to reinforce their socio-political networks (King 1984). Likewise, representations in stained glass projected piety and reinforced social hierarchies, acting as tools for the edification of the lay community (Hadley 2001). This gave the social elite a degree of control over how they would be memorialised after their death, and served to cement their memory as living persons in the physical space associated with their memorials. Through wills and bequests, such as the creation of hospitals and alms-houses, the wealthier members of medieval society implemented multiple strategies for remembrance aimed at securing a prominent place in the memory and prayers of their communities (Daniell 1997).

Wills often specified the bequest of particular objects to friends and family members, which could serve as mementos of the deceased. The will of Hull woman Elizabeth Bukk, dated 1459 bequeathed a rosary to each of her three daughters (Hadley 2001). Such objects would call to mind the memory of the departed with each use, calling upon the new owner to remember their former owner in their prayers. Books, particularly those of a devotional nature, also served as potent mementos and frequently became heirloom items amongst the literate classes (Hadley 2001).

## **6.8 Diaspora/Migrants**

By the end of the eleventh century, burial practices were broadly similar throughout Western Europe and Britain. Many of those who had migrated to Britain as part of the conquest were buried in their new homeland, with few instances of repatriation to Normandy (Hadley 2001). Throughout the medieval period people moved for mercantile, political, marital or religious purposes. Those who left Britain on religious pilgrimage might never return, as some of the more devout pilgrimages, such as those to Compostela and Rome were arduous journeys during which pilgrims were known to die on the road (Madigan 2015). In a similar fashion, the crusades also presented a form of pilgrimage from which the participants might not return. When crusaders and pilgrims died abroad a diverse range of treatments could be followed. The deceased could be buried close to the place of death, as in the case of Sir William Neville who was buried in Constantiople in 1391 (Daniell 1997). Others could be repatriated, either whole or in part: transport and separate burial of the heart was a practice that gained popularity during the crusades with this spreading to the wider (although still primarily elite) population (Daniell 1997; Horrox 1999).

## **6.9 Death of Children**

When an infant died they could be buried with their chrisom cloth, that was worn at the baptism, as this provided an indicator of their baptised status (Daniell 1997). For the unbaptised, surreptitious burial in disused churchyards continued into the fourteenth century (and possibly later), although the related practice of eaves drip burial ended in the twelfth century (Daniell 1997; Craig-Atkins 2014).

The performance of funerals for children noted their status as non-adults. Bells were rung for a shorter time than for the funerals of adults, and the fee payable to the gravedigger was halved (Daniell 1997).



There were also some proscriptions on place of burial. At the Dominican priory in Oxford, for example, child burials were restricted to the chapter house (Daniell 1997). Because of the differentiated treatment of children in death, they are generally underrepresented in medieval cemeteries (Dawes and Magilton 1980; Daniell 1997). Similarly, while funerary art depicting adults was common throughout the medieval period, depictions of children were rare (Daniell 1997), although during the fifteenth century some depictions of shrouded infants began to appear.

## 7. Reformation and Post-Reformation Burial Practices: the Secularisation of Death

The English Reformation commenced with Henry VIII's separation of the Church in England from the Church of Rome in 1534. The Reformation experienced a brief hiatus during the reign of Mary I in the mid sixteenth century, and was then reinstated under the reign of Elizabeth I (Gittings 1999). Whilst burial in the extended supine position continued as the dominant mode of interment throughout this period, the changes to religious life ushered in by the Reformation had significant impacts on the memorialisation strategies employed by the British population (Binski 1996; Daniell 1997). Acts of intercessory or devotional prayer were derided as superstition or blind faith, and the performance of good works was encouraged instead (Marshall 2002). From 1547 Chantry houses were banned, there was iconoclastic destruction of numerous existing monuments, and there were broad moves towards the secularisation of funerals (Marshall 2002; Roffey 2008). Memorials also became more secular, personalised and responsive to individual needs (Gittings 1999). This was a period of profound spiritual change as people sought to negotiate remembrance of the dead as being of significance for the living, rather than as a duty owed to the dead for the sake of their souls.

### 7.1 *The End of Purgatory*

The denial of purgatory and the dissolution of chantries triggered an irreversible shift in the memorialisation practices of the social elite in late medieval Britain. Following passage of the Chantry Act in 1547 thousands of chantries and endowments were confiscated (Roffey 2008). After centuries of increasingly costly investment in chantry provision, which had led to the professionalization of remembrance, and a consequent diversion of private wealth to the Church: "the act represented a moment of cathartic triumph, the cutting out from the body Christian of a bloated parasite, which had drained the material substance of believers, and endangered the souls it hypocritically professed to assist" (Marshall 2002, 95). The Act was more than a shrewd political manoeuvre or an asset-grabbing exercise; it reflected changing community beliefs that had been developing for over a generation (Gittings 1999).

The move towards the complete abandonment of purgatory was staged rather than immediate. By 1543, the use of the term was prohibited. The Act of 1545 legalised the dissolution of some chantries ahead of the wider confiscations under the Act of 1547 (Daniell 1997; Houlbrooke 1998). Tarlow (2010) argues, that for non-elite lay persons Catholic ideas and practices continued well into the Reformation period. The lavish chantry monuments and bequests of the upper classes had always been beyond the reach of the majority of the population, and the changes brought about by an elite minority, initially,

had little material impact on memorialisation practices. Similarly, the practice of praying for the dead continued into the Elizabethan era (Wooding 2013).

The abolition of purgatory and the belief that the soul reached its final destination immediately upon the moment of death fundamentally altered the relationship between the living and the dead (Marshall 2002). No actions taken by the living could assist the dead. Perhaps for the first time, in Britain, there was no need to provision the dead for their journey to the afterlife. The dead were beyond reach and the continuing ties that had been nourished through intercessory acts were irreversibly severed. For the bereaved, the negotiation of grief and remembrance was undertaken with little to guide them during this period. Yet, funerals and commemorative acts were now firmly focussed on the living as the only Christian souls who could benefit from their performance (Gittings 1999; Tingle and Willis 2015). Houlbrooke (1998) contended that the loss of intercessory prayer as a “form of constructive action...encouraged the fuller development of means of commemoration”.

Tarlow (2010, 26) has argued that, as “the last part of the deceased that was accessible”, the physical body became the focal point of interactions between the dead and the bereaved. Despite considerable theological debate about the need for, and role of, the body at the Resurrection, care was taken to prepare the corpse for burial, stave off physical decay and to treat the dead with dignity.

## ***7.2 Changes in Burial and Funerary Practice***

Following the Reformation, the wake or watch over the body, during the period between death and burial, declined in importance (Houlbrooke 1998). However, treatment of the deceased body for burial continued, as it had during the medieval period into the Reformation and on into the early modern period. Despite the theological shift in emphasis on the physical body, the cadaver was bathed, displayed and buried. For the wealthy, embalming practices continued with the removal of viscera, treatment with herbs and unguents, before wrapping in cerecloth to stave of bodily decay (Tarlow 2010). However, there was a gendered element to the frequency of embalming. Some elite women explicitly specified in their wills that they did not wish for their bodies to be embalmed (Houlbrooke 1998). The will of Mary Countess of Northumberland, for example stated that she would be “loathe to come into the hands of any living man” (as quoted in Tarlow 2010, 134). Whilst women usually performed the washing and preparation of the corpse, male physicians and surgeons performed embalmment (Tarlow 2010).

The social status and role of the deceased was emphasised in Reformation period funerals. For the social elite, a greater proportion of their investment went into explicit markers of status than had been the case during the pre-Reformation period (Daniell 1997). The provision of black funeral attire to mourners was the most prodigious expense (Houlbrooke 1998). For much of the sixteenth century funeral rites also continued largely as they had done during the medieval period. During the later decades of the century fears of ‘popish’ behaviours resulted in increasing proscriptions on aspects of pre-Reformation funerary practices, including attempts to reduce the ringing of bells and eliminate the use of lights at funeral services (Houlbrooke 1998). One way to avoid such proscriptions was through the emergent phenomenon of the ‘night funeral’, which necessitated the use of candles and torches (Wooding 2013). By the late sixteenth century, emerging expressions of Protestant piety saw



some members of the upper classes reject ostentatious funeral arrangements in their wills, and this increases in popularity until the Civil War (Houlbrooke 1998).

Wills of the medieval period emphasised the desire to be buried *ad sanctos*. By contrast, wills of the Reformation period frequently specify a desire to be buried close to other family members (Tarlow 2010). In the first half of the seventeenth century requests specifying burial location declined, with the majority of wills being silent on the subject by 1640 (Harding 2002). Many charnel houses were cleared during the Reformation, and these were subsequently appropriated by wealthy families to serve as private funeral vaults (Daniell 1997). There was regional variation in burial practice, and in Scotland in particular, burial within the church structure was prohibited in the latter half of the sixteenth century (Matheson 2010; Tarlow 2010). In response to this prohibition, members of the social elite constructed kirkyard mausolea and erected dedicated memorials within the church building, although the body was generally buried elsewhere (Tarlow 2010).

With the dissolution of chantries and the conversion of many former monastic sites to lay uses, many pre-Reformation Catholic burial grounds fell out of use (Whyte 2009). The shift of focus on sacred space, and associated burial grounds, created real tensions and some wealthier individuals had family and ancestral remains exhumed and relocated to new Protestant graveyards (Tarlow 2010). However, for the majority of the lay population, relocation was not practical or affordable and their dead remained where they were.

### 7.3 'Deviant' Burial

Deviant burial and mortuary treatments for criminals and suicides continued after the Reformation. During the early seventeenth century, as the medical profession was conducting research into human anatomy, the bodies of executed murderers could be donated to physicians and surgeons as part of the legal process (Gittings 1999). Houlbrooke (1998), however highlights that the proportion of the population who died by execution during the Reformation was low, and that from the sixteenth century capital punishment was in steep decline. He calculated that, in Middlesex for example, over the 75 year period from 1550-1625 an average of five persons were executed in any given year. As a limited resource, distribution of executed bodies for autopsy was tightly controlled. A number of contracts survive, indicating that the number of individuals subjected to this particular treatment was low. From 1505 the Edinburgh Guild of Surgeons and Barbers were guaranteed one executed criminal every year. In 1540 there was a contract in place for Caius College, Cambridge for an annual supply of one executed criminal for dissection, and the London Company of Barbers and Surgeons was granted licence to receive bodies. By 1549 Oxford also had a contract in place for one executed body each year (Bennett 2018). There is some information about which individuals were selected for such treatment. Court records from the Old Bailey dictate public dissection in sentencing, specifically as part of the punishment, which was commensurate with the perceived egregious nature of the crimes committed. Serious tensions were created following such judgements, and (Laqueur 1989, 313) notes that at Oxford "students and friends of the condemned fought regularly over the bodies designated for dissection" and riots occurred in London. Tarlow (2010) has suggested that wealthier families could employ their influence or offer bribes to gaolers and executioners for the release of executed bodies. Those whose relatives lacked wealth or influence were most likely to end up on the autopsy table.

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth century these anatomical dissections were frequently held in public – the exposure and denial of dignity in death serving as an additional form of punishment in a practice that Tarlow (2010, 77) terms “punitive and pedagogical anatomy”. However, in the latter half of the seventeenth century public autopsies declined in frequency, and moved to closed spaces within hospitals and universities, with attendance being progressively restricted to those undertaking medical training (Tarlow 2010; Bennett 2018).

Accidental death and suicides were far more common forms of ‘bad death’ during the Reformation than death by execution (Houlbrooke 1998). According to the new Protestant doctrine churchyard burial was not necessary for the departed to gain entry to Heaven, yet the desire for burial on consecrated ground remained strong (Tarlow 2010). Non-Christian deaths, suicides and the deaths of excommunicates continued to be problematic, and could create tensions within communities, with these frequently resulting in exclusion from consecrated Protestant burial grounds. Further, with the shift to Protestantism, new tensions emerged between Catholics and Protestants, particularly with regard to access to burial grounds (Tarlow 2010). The ongoing use of former Catholic sites for burial also raises the issue of recusant Catholics. For those who resisted the new faith, burial in spaces associated with the old church may have been desirable (Tarlow 2010). However, Catholics could be refused burial in Protestant graveyards, and in the early years of the Reformation, they may have been excommunicated from the new church and denied Protestant burial rites on the basis that they were excommunicants.

The exclusion of suicides from churchyard burial was enacted as a form of punishment for the family of the suicide, (along with the confiscation of assets) as the deceased was beyond the reach of mortal laws (Houlbrooke 1998; Sayer 2011). Social attitudes towards suicide were also changing during the early modern period, as these were increasingly viewed with compassion, and throughout the seventeenth century they were more frequently interpreted as the result of an unsound mind (Houlbrooke 1998).

Unsanctioned burial grounds emerged, known as *cella* or *cillini*. The practice may be related to the eavesdrip burials of the Late Anglo-Saxon and medieval period, as many of these burial spaces were located within, or close to, the ruins of earlier monastic centres, disused Catholic churchyards or older pre-Christian monuments (Tarlow 2010). Unbaptised infants and ‘bad deaths’ were concentrated in these spaces, which appear to have emerged first in Ireland during the sixteenth century, but which are subsequently also recorded in Britain at sites like Tintagel, Cornwall (Tarlow 2010). These unsanctioned burial grounds could be marked with a cross, and new memorialisation practices emerged to commemorate these individuals, who were denied traditional modes of remembrance (Tarlow 2010). This creates a complex grey area between recusants, excommunicants and ‘bad deaths’ as well as between whether burial in an unsanctioned burials space may have been seen as punishment or as a signifier of true faith. Similarly, the execution of heretics and unrepentant Catholics traversed the line between ‘bad death’ and martyrdom (Houlbrooke 1998; Gordon and Rist 2013).

## 7.4 Changing Memorialisation Practices

The annual remembrance of the departed in the form of the Catholic *obit* was replaced in the Reformation by more personal, individualised remembrances, often marking the anniversary of the death (Houlbrooke 1998).

Memorial practice was changing in the decades preceding the Reformation. Following a period of sharp increase in the creation of new physical monuments during the late fifteenth century, Finch (2003) notes a decline in the creation of new physical monuments in the early sixteenth century. It is likely that this decline in monuments reflected a shift in bequests from the church to executors and family members, which was occurring in the decades preceding the Act of 1547 (Daniell 1997). However, as can be seen in Figure 11, even after the Reformation, certain individuals were able to create monuments that would appear out of place in the changing context of Reformation. The political upheaval and iconoclastic fervour of the sixteenth century also fed into this decline in the erection of physical memorials, as many avoided the creation of any memorial that might be seen to breach or confront new Protestant ideals (Tarlow 2010).



Figure 2: Tomb and funerary monument to Sir William Sharington (d.1553) in St Cyriac's Church Lacock, Wiltshire retains traces of paint which are rare for post-1547 monuments. Photograph by Yvonne Inall.

Over time, the liturgical changes that came with the Reformation also changed the language and focus of remembrance (Finch 2003). Pre-Reformation chantry monuments were frequently explicit in their exhortations for the living to pray for the soul of deceased (Roffey 2008). By Contrast, newly erected monuments of the Reformation period were simply dedicated to the memory of individuals, without calls for acts of intercession (Finch 2003). Pre-Reformation monuments looked to the future, fostering an ongoing relationship with the dead, which was aimed at aiding their journey through purgatory. By contrast, post-Reformation monuments were static, offering a retrospective view of the deceased's life. Inscriptions became longer, offering accounts of the life and deeds performed in a *res gestae* approach to memorialisation (Finch 2003).

Puritan influences also led to more austere memorial forms and placements, reflecting new ideas of Christian piety. These ideas were not restricted to the social elite however, and percolated through society in general, being expressed in diverse forms (Houlbrooke 1998; Finch 2003).

## 7.5 Emerging Forms of Memorialisation

The English Reformation placed controls upon the acceptable modes of memorialisation (Gittings 1999). An age of more austere, secularised funerary services was ushered in, beyond the legal abolition of chantry services (Roffey 2008). The focus of memorialisation shifted from the religious and public to the private sphere, with many memorials taking the form of portraiture and small, portable mementos, facilitating intimate, individual acts of remembrance (Gittings 1999).

One of the most significant shifts in the performance of funerals was the introduction of prayer books written in English, which occurred alongside the cessation of Latin masses for the dead (Houlbrooke 1998). Under the reign of Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I numerous prayer books were published. These were representative of the diversity of funeral services that were performed throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century, and these reflected the variant forms of Protestantism and lingering traditionalism (Daniell 1997; Wooding 2013). The increasing use of lay language would have had a significant effect on the memory formation of attendees, offering a new touchstone for shared remembrance. Funeral sermons also began to be printed, creating a new form of memorialisation, with more than one hundred examples surviving from the Elizabethan era (Houlbrooke 1998). In 1640, at the end of the study period, Featley *et al.* (1640) published a collection of 47 funeral sermons to serve as *ars moriendi* and *memento mori*, providing “continual readings that which may furnish us abundantly with meditations” on mortality. The work was popular enough to be followed by later editions, and spark a wider fashion of publishing funeral sermons throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century (Houlbrooke 1998).

The seventeenth century also saw the continuing employment of *memento mori* (Gittings 1999). The departed were depicted in statuary and portrait art, frequently in life scenes, alongside living relatives (Finch 2003). Subtle *memento mori* motifs indicated that these individuals were no longer among the living. Portraits of bereaved persons affecting an air of melancholy also proliferated from the Elizabethan period, expressing socially acceptable forms loss (Houlbrooke 1998). These changes impacted significantly on memory formation around the deceased. Rather than the repetitive rote memory of liturgy and prayer that had formed the core of medieval intercession, memories were now more individualistic, personalised and experiential (Gordon and Rist 2013).

## 8. Conclusion

There are recurrent themes in the memorialisation strategies employed across time, from the Iron Age to the early modern period. Memorialisation begins with the dead body, which is the focus of memory-making displays and performances. Caring interaction, preparation and curation of the body are evidenced by the survival of shrouds and layered textiles throughout the Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods. These practices indicate careful dressing of the corpse, and allow inference of a period of viewing. Some Romano-British burials show that attempts were sometimes made to preserve the corpse, and in the Anglo-Saxon, medieval and early modern periods we have clear



indications for bodily treatments and embalming, aimed at slowing the processes of physical decomposition.

Across time, the transportation of remains to dedicated burial places suggests that funerary processions may well have formed part of the mnemonic experiences around death. Detailed accounts of the medieval and early modern periods demonstrate that funerary processions were multisensory performances designed to cultivate lasting memories of the deceased, the funeral event and the renegotiated relationships between the living and the dead.

The grave goods that were included in burials in each period reflect the cosmological belief systems of the memorialising society. The provision of offerings of food and drink, footwear, horses and boats allude to journeys to the afterlife. These offerings demonstrate that during the Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon eras there was a ubiquitous belief that the dead travelled to reach the realm of the ancestors, and that the actions of the living could aid them on their journey. This theme continued into Christian medieval practice, however, the journey became spiritual rather than physical, and it was the prayers and remembrance of the living that aided the dead on their passage through Purgatory. There was a significant cosmological shift during the Reformation as the journey to the afterlife came to be perceived as instantaneous at death. This rendered the living incapable of offering assistance to the departed, and this could create significant tensions for mourners.

Lasting memorials took on a range of forms. In the Iron Age these were particularly diverse, including the use of the physical remains of the deceased, which were fragmented and incorporated into settlement spaces, or embedded into the landscape in deathscapes. These often focussed on, or elaborated upon, pre-existing Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments. The burial mounds of Eastern Yorkshire, in particular, were pervasive in the landscape. Across Iron Age burial traditions, deathscapes had viewsheds that took in existing settlements, routeways and monuments, creating a constant ancestral presence and a reminder of the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. Similarly, in the Roman period, the erection of gravestones, lining the roads into urban centres would capture the attention of anyone entering the city, speaking poignantly of loss, grief and remembrance. The desire to connect the recently departed to places of ancestral memory resurged during the Anglo-Saxon era, with the reuse of Bronze Age and Iron Age monuments for new burials. Cremated remains were curated within communities, before being deposited in burial grounds within view of settlements, again maintaining relationships between the living and the dead.

For the medieval dead, remembrance was never more important, and the social elite actively engaged with their memorials, often designing and constructing them during life. Elaborate chantry monuments demanded attention and diverse modes of memorialisation were employed, which included funeral gifts, bequests of land and hospitals, and liturgical remembrances. For the non-elite laity, more modest remembrances took the form of lights and prayers. The use of light in the performance of funerary ritual was also noted during the Romano-British period, and has been a recurrent theme in religious rituals across time and cultures. With the abolition of chantries in the English Reformation, memorial forms shifted to become more personalised accounts of lives lived with pious purpose, with the departed now safe in a Protestant Heaven. Other remembrances took the form of portraiture, books and small objects of material culture, which were perceived as forging a lasting connection with the deceased.



Throughout the study period, the treatment of 'bad deaths' elicited punishing and/or ameliorating responses to the tensions created. Particularly from the Romano-British to the medieval periods, prone burial and decapitation were recurrent practices. Such rites could have been attempts to prevent malevolent and vengeful spirits from returning from the grave to harm the living, but any number of reasons could account for the rites enacted. In the medieval and Reformation periods, dismemberment, mutilation and public dissection, were all practiced for those who were seen to have breached social norms. Suicides, unbaptised infants and excommunicants were excluded from Christian burial grounds, and were perceived as both spiritually and socially dead.

The memorialisation and remembrance of the dead has run as a constant thread through the social fabric of Britain from earlier prehistory, through the Iron Age to the early modern period, and beyond. While the strategies employed varied subtly, the overarching need to maintain a close relationship with the dead (often to protect the living), and to keep them active within communities, ran deep, and formed bonds which continued beyond the grave.

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