In the Shadow of the Church

Burial practices in the Wessex heartlands

c.600-1100 AD

Part 1

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of the introduction of Christianity and the ensuing consolidation of the position of the Anglo-Saxon church on burial practices between c. 600-1100AD in the Wessex heartlands. At the core of this study is a survey of the burial evidence in the counties of Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire (below the Thames), Somerset and Wiltshire. This data is then used to examine the influence of the Church on the treatment of the body, grave type and grave variations, and on the commemoration of the dead. This study also examines the evidence for the development of churchyard burial. Finally, the impact of the re-emergence of urban centres on burial is investigated through the use of two cases studies focusing on early medieval Southampton and Winchester.

This study demonstrates that the initial impact of the Church on burial practices was limited and that most of the changes seen in mortuary behaviour in the seventh and even eighth century should be seen predominately as the result of other factors. In contrast, by the late Saxon period, the Church appears to have had a major influence over burial practices and it had become inextricably linked with burial and commemoration. In particular, the Church had a profound impact on burial location, with the development of churchyard burial, although the transition to churchyard burial was not as rapid as once thought with burial outside churchyards persisting into the tenth century within the study area. The later Saxon period also saw the Church increasing its control over the ceremonial and ideological aspects of burial. The Church provided funerary services such as prayers and masses prior to and during burial, the dead were interred in ground consecrated by the Church and commemorated in masses and prayers conducted by the Church. This is particularly apparent in the archaeological evidence for the commemoration of the dead both in the Christian iconography seen on funerary sculpture and in the inscriptions many bear with their references to Christian beliefs in the afterlife seen on funerary sculpture in late Saxon Wessex. The Church's impact on other aspects of the funerary process, such as the grave elaboration and the treatment of the body, was more subtle and indirect, and at times inadvertent.

Finally, while the primary focus of this study is the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon Church and mortuary behaviour, this work has generated a number of secondary findings. The case studies on burial in Southampton and Winchester with their multiple cemeteries and scattered isolated burials provide a graphic illustration of the complexity of burial in early medieval urban centres. The studies also demonstrate that the density and distribution of occupation within urban centres is correlated with cemetery number and location. In addition, the data generated by the survey of burial evidence in this study have allowed the chronological and geographical distribution of funerary practices within the study area to be examined. This research also confirms the findings of a number of other studies that gender and, to a lesser extent, age cease to be major factors in determining funerary provision, although social identity does continue to be signalled and to determine the nature of grave elaboration associated with many late Saxon burials.

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Abbreviations

Primary Sources

ASC	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
HE	Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People

Counties

Bd	Bedfordshire
Bk	Berkshire
Bu	Buckinghamshire
Ca	Cambridgeshire
Cl	Clwyd
Co	Cornwall
Ex	Essex
D & G	Dumfries & Galloway
Db	Derbyshire
Do	Dorset
Dv	Devon
Dy	Dyfed
Gl	Gloucestershire
GL	Greater London
Ha	Hampshire
Hf	Herefordshire
Ht	Hertfordshire
IOW	Isle of Wight
Kt	Kent
Li	Lincolnshire
Ln	Lancastershire
Nf	Norfolk
Nh	Northamptonshire
NYk	North Yorkshire
Ox	Oxfordshire
So	Somerset
WSx	West Sussex
Wi	Wiltshire
WYk	West Yorkshire

Chapter 1

Introduction

By the end of the eleventh century, the earthly remains of the vast majority of the population of England were laid to rest in unfurnished graves in the shadow of a church, be it a small village church or one of the large new Norman cathedrals under construction in many urban centres. This represented a fundamental change from the mortuary practices of the fifth and sixth centuries when the remains of the deceased are found as inhumations or cremations in field cemeteries or interred in barrows, often, especially in the eastern two-thirds of the country, accompanied by grave goods. Given the profound and far reaching changes in burial practices seen during the early medieval period (defined in this study as c.450-1100AD), it is perhaps not surprising that the study of the mortuary practices of this period has a considerable antiquity. However these analyses have traditionally tended to focus on the furnished burials of the fifth to seventh centuries, with the unfurnished burials of the eighth to eleventh centuries often being overlooked. This, in part, may be due to the traditional view that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to Christianity during the seventh century led to the rapid abandonment of furnished burial, and ushered in an era of homogenous churchyard burial (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:51).

The validity of these assumptions has been increasingly questioned with recent work demonstrating that the transition to churchyard burial was far from rapid or straightforward (Hadley 2000a:160; 2000b:199; Blair 2005:245). Furthermore, the decline in the use of grave goods led not to uniformity of burial practices but, instead, to the expression of individuality through other aspects of the burial rite, such as the use of funerary furnishing and above-ground markers (Hadley 2000b:216). These findings serve to highlight both the increasing need for a comprehensive analysis of post-sixth-century burials and that any such analysis must consider all aspects of burial practice, not just what went in the ground. Moreover, any study of the transition to churchyard burial must consider the impact of the Church on early medieval burial. While the traditional view of the nascent Anglo-Saxon Church as a powerful influence on the burial practices of the seventh and eighth centuries

has now been disputed (Bullough 1989:186; Boddington 1990:194; Halsall 1995:61-3; Hadley 2000a:170), it is equally important to recognise that the introduction of a new faith did have far-reaching effects on the burial practices of the early medieval period. Few would dispute that the establishment of churchyard burial owes much to the machinations of the Church and the later Saxon period saw the Church establish an increasing jurisdiction over burial. However, it is equally important to recognise that Christianity brought with it an alternative to traditional burial practices and that these new ways of perceiving, treating and commemorating the dead would be reflected in the funerary rites of the early medieval period (Hadley 2000a:172). As such, the aim of this study is to examine the nature of funerary provision accorded to individuals between 600-1100AD and to consider the impact of the Church on the burial practices of this period.

1.1. The selection and definition of the study area

A nationwide survey of all available evidence for early medieval burial between 600 and 1100AD is a vast area of enquiry and one beyond the scope of this study. Instead this analysis will focus on the mortuary evidence from the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex. This selection was determined not only by the kingdom's pre-eminence during the later Saxon period but also by its geographical location. Wessex, as one of the mostly westerly of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, has in the sixth and seventh centuries the typical Anglo-Saxon furnished inhumations and cremations in the eastern half, but the "British" burial practices of unfurnished inhumation and the continued use of some Roman cemeteries in the western counties. The final factor is that, by focusing on an area which lacks both Viking settlement and the breakdown of ecclesiastical structure associated with Viking activity, this study provides a contrast to much of the current work on later burial practices, which has tended to focus on the northern Danelaw (Hadley 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Buckberry 2004 & forthcoming). However, it should be noted that while the primary focus of this study lies in Wessex, comparative material from elsewhere in the British Isles is used where appropriate.

Having selected the Wessex area as the focus of this research, defining the boundaries of the area included in the study was more problematic. It was important that the area selected for inclusion in this study had an historical integrity yet, at the beginning of the seventh century, Wessex to all intents and purposes did not exist and, by the end of the eleventh century, the West Saxon kings controlled most of England. Thus, for the purposes of this research, the study area is roughly defined as those lands under West Saxon control by the mid-ninth century. This area, which consists of the historic counties of Berkshire, Devon, Dorset,

Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight), Somerset and Wiltshire, is often considered to be the heartland of the West Saxon Kingdom (Yorke 1995:1). The historical basis behind the definition of the study area will now be outlined.

The area, which was to become the Wessex heartlands, was created by the seventh-, eighth- and ninth-century military conquests of the West Saxon kings (Yorke 1995:52), and bears no relation to earlier political and administrative districts (*ibid.*:1). It is impossible to reconstruct the process by which the study area came under West Saxon control in any detail as there are few contemporary sources (Yorke 1999:26) and, while there are entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, the Chronicle itself is a product of the ninth century (Swanton 2000:xviii). As such many of its earliest entries are not so much a reflection of the events of the fifth, sixth and early seventh centuries as an illustration of how the ninth-century West Saxons wished their origins to be perceived (Yorke 1989:85; Blair 1994:37).

The origins of Wessex lie, not as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests in the modern county of Hampshire, but on the periphery of the area now considered the heartland of Wessex, in the upper reaches of the Thames Valley (Yorke 1989:94; Blair 1994:37). In the early part of the seventh century, a people calling themselves the "Gewisse" were consolidating their control of parts of the modern counties of Oxfordshire and Berkshire and through into north Wiltshire (*ibid.*:39). However, by the mid-seventh century, the expansionist policies of the Gewisse were checked by the rising power of Mercia, which forced them out of their original homelands in the upper Thames valley (Yorke 1995:62), compelling them to expand to the south and south-west (*ibid.*:57). Although the details are lacking, there are strong indications that this expansion south had, by the time King Caedwalla conquered the Isle of Wight in 686 AD (*HE* IV:16 – Sherley-Price 1990:230), encompassed much of modern Hampshire, including the Jutish Kingdom to the south (Yorke 1989:92). In addition, a second Gewissan see had been established at Winchester[1] (HE III:7-Sherley-Price 1990:154). The conquest of the Jutish provinces of southern Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is considered to be an important stage in the formation of Wessex and it is from this point in Bede's narrative that the royal house is consistently referred to as "West Saxon" as opposed to "Gewisse" (Walker 1956:183-4).

The seventh century also saw the westward expansion of West Saxon control with charters from Malmesbury, Sherborne and Glastonbury testifying to the growing influence of the

[1] The first Gewissan see was at Dorchester, but this was lost when the area fell into Mercian hands (Yorke 1995:58).

West Saxon kings in the historic counties of Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire (Yorke 1995:60). Again the method and route of this expansion are unclear, but the fact that St Boniface entered a monastery in Exeter controlled by an English abbot suggests the area was under West Saxon control by the 680s (Levison 1905:6). By the end of the seventh century, much of the study area lay in West Saxon hands, yet parts of western Devon remained under the control of the Kings of Dumnonia. Equally, the control of the upper Thames valley remained fiercely contested between Wessex and Mercia, with the latter having the upper hand (Blair 1994:54; Yorke 1995:61-64). Both the northern and western borders of the study area were to remain contested areas throughout the eighth century. The point at which Devon can be said to be securely in West Saxon hands is difficult to ascertain. The battle at Hingston Down, on the Cornish side of the Tamar, which saw the Britons and their Scandinavian allies put to flight by the West Saxons (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A: 835 – Swanton 2000:62), is often considered to mark the point at which the West Saxons secured nominal control over all of Cornwall (Finberg 1964:105). It is probably safe to assume that the West Saxon control of Devon was also complete at this point.

The ninth century also saw changes in the relationship between Mercia and Wessex and in the conflict over the upper Thames Valley. West Saxon military success in 802AD seems to have placed what is now north Wiltshire and north Somerset permanently under West Saxon control (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A:800 – Swanton 2000:58; Yorke 1995:64), while in 825AD, King Ecgberht of Wessex permanently annexed what is now Kent, Sussex and Surrey from Mercia (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A:823 – Swanton 2000:60). This success was followed by the temporary conquest of Mercia itself, which only lasted a year (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A:827 & 828 – Swanton 2000:60,62), but significantly changed the relationship between Mercia and Wessex with the latter now having the upper hand (Blair 1994:56). Berkshire remained under Mercian control until the mid-ninth century when it passed to Wessex during King Aethelwulf's reign (839-58) (Yorke 1995:64).

By defining the study area as land held by the West Saxon kings by the mid-ninth century it could be argued that the south-eastern counties of Kent, Sussex and Surrey as well as Cornwall should also be included. Yet the south-eastern counties were governed as a separate sub-kingdom until Aethelbald became king of both halves of Wessex in 860 (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A:860 – Swanton 2000:66), while Cornwall retained much of its independence, only being brought securely under West Saxon control during the reign of Athelstan in the tenth century (Hoskins 1960:21). Furthermore, at least part of the historic shires of Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight), Dorset, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Berkshire were either under West Saxon control by the end of the seventh century or, in the

case of the upper Thames valley, had been earlier in the century, but were then subsequently lost to Mercia.

Having decided to focus on the six shires of the Wessex heartlands it was then necessary to define this area with respect to modern county boundaries, a process which requires a degree of compromise between historical accuracy and practical necessity. In some cases, the process was very straightforward as the modern boundaries of the counties of Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight), Dorset, Devon, Somerset[2] and Wiltshire closely approximate those of the earlier Saxon shires (Yorke 1995:328). This allows the western reaches of the study area to be set along the Devon/Cornwall border, while the Hampshire/Sussex border forms the eastern limits. The major problems arise when trying to define the northern border of the study area. This area formed a buffer zone between Mercia and Wessex during the seventh and eighth centuries with the exact position of the frontier changing on a regular basis to reflect the fluctuating fortunes of the two kingdoms (Blair 1994:56). The western part of the northern border is formed by the northern boundaries of North Somerset, Bath and North-East Somerset and Wiltshire. While this has probably resulted in the inclusion of a number of areas, such as the city of Bath which remained in Mercian hands until the late ninth century (Davenport 2002:41), it is the simplest means of defining the border. To define the eastern part of the study area's northern border, the policy of adhering to modern county boundaries had to be abandoned as numerous local government reorganisations have rendered late Saxon Berkshire unrecognisable. All of modern Berkshire is included and also southern Oxfordshire below the Thames as the River emerged as a permanent frontier between Mercia and Wessex once the two kingdoms began to use diplomacy rather than military might to settle their differences (Blair 1994:56). The final extent of the study area is illustrated in figure 1 and summarised in table 1.1.

1.2. Structure of the Work

Chapter two establishes the context of the study, both in terms of previous work on the mortuary practices of the early medieval period and also in terms of the religious background of early medieval Wessex. This chapter considers the nature of burial evidence and the assumptions that have traditionally been made when analysing funerary remains from the early medieval period. Chapter two also provides an overview of the traditional assumptions on the role of Christianity in shaping the burial practices of the seventh and eighth centuries

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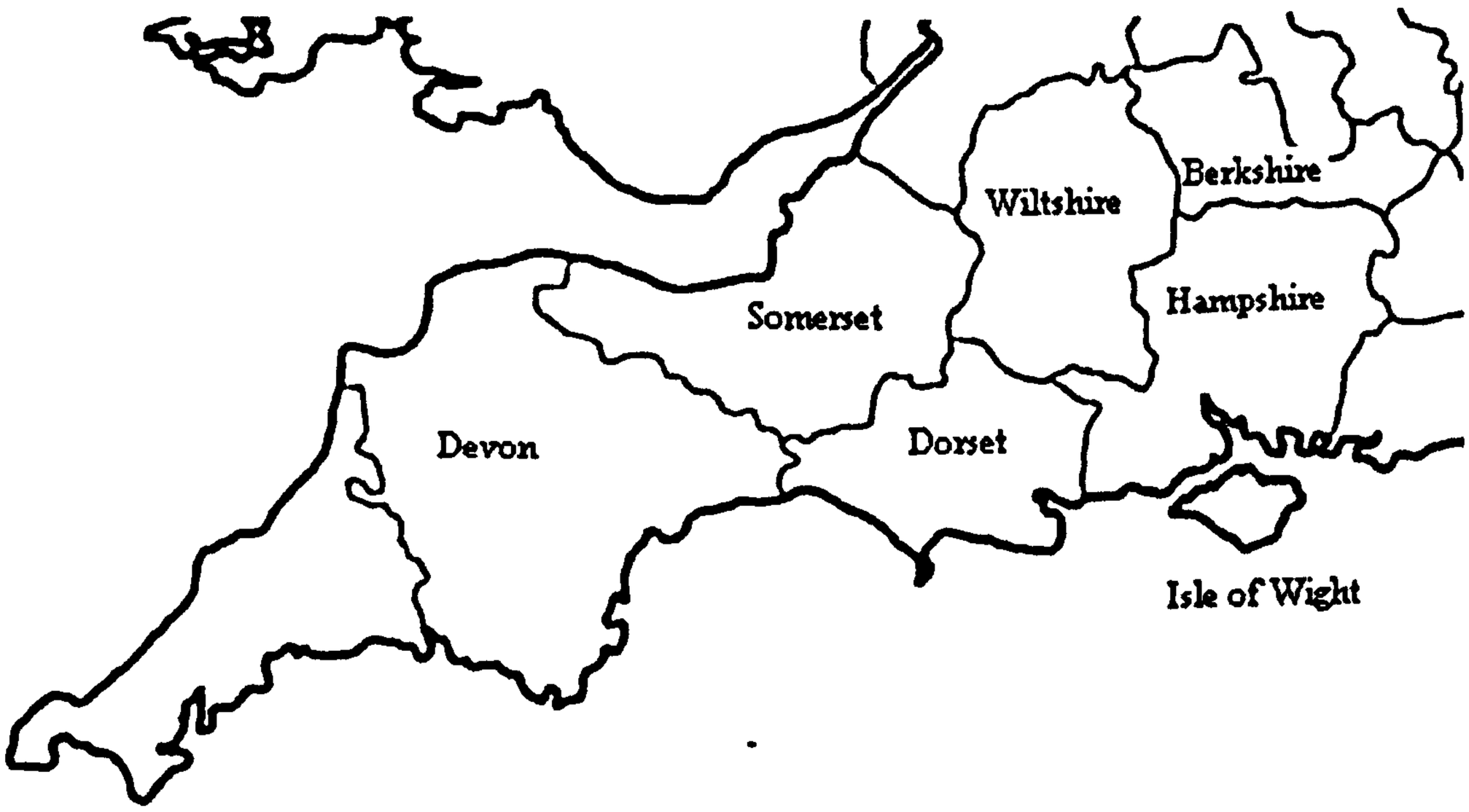
[2] The modern counties of Somerset, North Somerset and Bath and North-East Somerset when combined closely approximate the late Saxon shire of Somerset.

Table 1.1. Modern counties and unitary authorities which correspond to the six historic shires of the Wessex heartlands

Late Saxon Shire	Modern counties and unitary authorities	Abbreviation used
Berkshire	West Berkshire Oxfordshire, south of the Thames Reading Wokinghan Bracknall Forest Windsor and Maidenhead	Bk
Devon	Devon Exeter Plymouth Torbay	Dv
Dorset	Dorset Poole Bournemouth	Do
Hampshire	Hampshire Portsmouth Southampton Winchester	Ha
Somerset	Somerset North Somerset Bath and North-East Somerset	So
Wiltshire	Wiltshire Swindon	Wi

Figure 1.1. The study area showing the boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon shires



and summarises the major critiques of this view. Finally this chapter provides an outline of the kingdom's conversion to Christianity to provide a wider context for this study.

Chapter three concerns the identification and assessment of the archaeological evidence for early medieval burial in the Wessex heartlands. It establishes the methodology and parameters used for the identification of sites, as well as considering the effects of topography, land use and antiquarianism on the distribution of burial evidence. Having established the scope of the material, this chapter then examines some of the problems and biases inherent in the dataset and the implications this may have for the subsequent analysis. In particular, how is it possible to reconcile the research aim of producing a comprehensive picture of early medieval mortuary practices, with the reality of the highly variable levels of quality seen in both primary records and published data? In many cases, the fragmentary nature or incomplete recording of many sites makes them unsuitable for in-depth study. Chapter three outlines the criteria used in selecting those sites included in the dataset used for detailed analysis, as well as the type of details recorded about the mortuary treatment of each burial within the dataset. This chapter also outlines the programme of radiocarbon dating undertaken as part of this study.

The primary objective of chapters four, five and six is to provide a comprehensive survey of the range and scope of variation in mortuary practices seen in the Wessex heartlands between c.600-1100AD. Chapter four focuses on the corpse and considers the treatment of the body before, during and after burial. The remains of the deceased are central to any funerary rites with the treatment of the body in many ways providing the best indication of a society's attitude towards the dead. While inhumation is the dominant burial rite in Wessex during the early medieval period, cremations are also present and this chapter examines the evidence for the persistence of this practice into the seventh, and possibly the eighth century, within the study area. The chapter then focuses on inhumation burial and examines the way in which the body is arranged within the grave, and the orientation of the grave itself. Finally, the post-burial treatment of the body is considered. Are the deceased left to rest in peace or is this eternal rest short lived with the graves of later generations destroying earlier burials? This chapter also considers the impact of the church's legislation and teachings, particularly concepts of the afterlife and resurrection, on the perception and treatment of the body.

In chapter five, the focus moves from the body to the grave and its furnishings. Work on

later Saxon burial in the northern Danelaw has demonstrated that the decline in the use of grave goods did not usher in an era of uniformity in burial (Hadley 2000b:209). Instead the forum for display changed with the burials of the later Saxon period exhibiting marked variation in grave type - including the use of different materials, such as charcoal and stone, to line the grave and the use of grave structures, such as ledges and head recesses – and in grave furnishings – including coffins and/or wooden linings, beds, grave goods, pillow stones and footrests. Unlike grave goods, other aspects of grave elaboration, such as structures within the grave and grave linings, have been the subject of few systematic studies and these have either focused on the early or middle Saxon periods or on areas outside the Wessex region (Stoodley 1999a; Buckberry 2004). As such, this chapter provides the first comprehensive survey of the range of variation seen in grave types and grave variations within the study area between 600-1100AD. The chapter also considers chronological and regional variations in grave elaboration and the role of sex and age of the deceased in determining the provision of funerary furnishings. Finally, the influence of the Church on the changing nature of grave elaboration is considered.

In chapter six, the focus moves above ground to examine the use of above-ground markers in the Wessex region as a means of illustrating the range and variation of funerary commemoration. Above-ground commemoration could take many forms. At one extreme were simple above-ground markers, such as stone grave covers and grave markers of stone as well as more ephemeral wooden structures. Commemorative markers also occured on a larger scale with the early medieval population of constructed barrows, enclosures, pyramids and even churches as a means to remember their dead. In addition the re-use of ancient monuments, such as barrows, hill-forts and temples during the early medieval period (Shephard 1979; Carver 2002; Williams 1997, 1998) may also have provided a form of remembrance. Chapter six surveys the range of above-ground commemoration seen in Wessex and considers what impact the arrival of Christianity may have had on the way the dead were remembered.

In chapters seven and eight, the focus moves away from the individual burial, as the study considers the impact of the new faith on burial location within the study area. Recent years have seen increasing emphasis on the importance of considering the placement of the dead within the landscape as an integral part of any analysis of mortuary practices (Barrett 1989, 1991; Parker Pearson 1984, 1985, 1993; Bevan 1994). The development of churchyard burial

represents a fundamental shift in burial location and, in many ways, represents the greatest impact of the Church on funerary behaviour during the early medieval period. The traditional view of the transition to churchyard burial was one of rapid abandonment of "pagan cemeteries" following the arrival of the Roman Church with the burial of the majority of the dead in Christian churchyards well established by the early eighth century (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:54). However, recent work has demonstrated that this model for the transition to churchyard burial is far too simplistic. For, while the advent of Christianity provided an alternative burial location in the form of churchyards from the late seventh or early eighth century, there is also an increasing body of evidence for non-churchyard burial continuing to, at least, the ninth century (Hadley 2000b:209). Chapter seven first examines the evidence for the advent of churchyard burial in Wessex in the seventh century. The chapter then uses documentary and archaeological evidence to consider the rate at which churchyard burial was adopted by the majority of the population.

In chapter eight, the focus shifts from a regional to a local level with a detailed examination of burial in two of early medieval Wessex's most important urban centres, Southampton and Winchester. These two "urban" centres contain the greatest concentrations of early medieval burials within the study area and both provide a complete sequence of urban burials from the beginning of the eighth century to the conquest and beyond. Furthermore, there is considerable information about the pre-conquest development and character of both settlements as the result of a series of extensive post-war excavations (Morton 1992a; Andrews 1997; Addyman & Hill 1968; Cunliffe 1964; Collis 1978; Biddle 1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1975a, 1975b; Biddle & Quirk 1962; Scobie *et al* 1991; Scobie & Qualmann 1993), which allows changes in burial practice and location to be considered with respect to the growth and development of these urban centres.

Having surveyed the evidence for early medieval burial practices in Wessex, chapter nine uses the results of the study to consider the impact of the introduction of Christianity on mortuary behaviour and provides a synthesis of the influence of the Church on burial practices and burial location during the early medieval period. In addition, while the primary focus of this study was the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon Church and mortuary behaviour, this work has generated a number of secondary findings and these are briefly discussed in chapter nine. Finally, possible directions for further work are considered.

1.3. Conventions and terminology used in this study.

A veritable plethora of terms have been used to describe a variety of chronological sub-divisions of the early medieval period. They range from simple division into early, middle

and late Saxon through to those terms, which are event related such as migration period and conversion period. As such, it is necessary to clarify the chronological subdivisions used in this study. During this analysis, there are some instances where it is necessary to distinguish between the earlier and later parts of the study period. In this study the term "Middle Saxon" will be used to denote the period from the seventh to the ninth centuries and the term "Late Saxon" the ninth through to the eleventh. These divisions are, like many chronological divisions, to some extent arbitrary (Geake 1997:1), and the overlap in the ninth century reflects both the difficulty in accurately dating burials from the eighth century onwards and the lack of any obvious single point at which to place a chronological division. Finally, it should be noted that the terms, such as middle Saxon etc, are applied to both the western and eastern halves of the study area and carry no ethnic connotations.

Chapter 2

The Cross and the Grave:

Christianity and the analysis of early medieval burials

Before considering the evidence for burial within the study area between 600-1100AD, it is necessary to consider previous work on post-seventh-century burials. This chapter outlines the traditional assumptions on the role of Christianity in shaping burial practices from the seventh century onwards and summarises the major critiques of this view. The chapter also provides an outline of the kingdom of the West Saxons' conversion to Christianity to provide a wider context for this study. In addition, this chapter provides a brief consideration of the nature of the burial data and its inherent biases, before considering the assumptions that have been made when analysing funerary remains from the early medieval period in the past. Finally, the inferences that can justifiably be drawn from burial data are considered along with any implications this may have on the approach taken to both data collection and analysis in this study.

2.1. Burial practices and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity

While the material remains of the early medieval period have been the subject of serious study for more than two centuries, all too often the archaeology of this period has been guided by a historical agenda with material evidence either interpreted using the existing historic framework or used to reinforce historically accepted "fact" (Champion 1990:89). Even through extant documentary sources are comparatively scarce until the tenth and eleventh centuries (Hill 1981), the influence they have in shaping perception of the early medieval period has been profound. This is particularly true of burial data, with Bede's account of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, following the arrival of the

Augustinian mission in 597AD, used as an explanation of the changes in burials practices seen during the seventh century. It was argued that the conversion to the new faith led to the rapid decline of furnished burial (Leeds 1936:96), accompanied by the abandonment of traditional "pagan" cemeteries and a rapid transition to churchyard burial (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:54). This argument was further refined with the suggestion that there was an intermediate stage between the traditional "pagan" burial grounds of the fifth and sixth centuries and the adoption of churchyard burial (Hyslop 1963:191; Meaney & Hawkes 1970:54). This took the form of small cemeteries containing the "final phase" of furnished burial, a phase characterised by a lower number of furnished burials than seen in the cemeteries of the fifth and sixth century (Geake 1992:84; Lethbridge 1931:83 and 1936:27), and by differences in the type of grave goods used (Geake 1997:107). This model, which became known as the "final phase", was to have far reaching effects on the study of burial practices between 600 and 1100AD. Once the association had been made between the introduction of Christianity and the changes in mortuary practice seen in the seventh and eighth centuries, there was a tendency to use the new faith as the automatic explanation for every change seen in the burials of this period without due consideration of other possible causes. Furthermore, the model's assumption of a rapid transition to churchyard burial had the effect of focusing the analysis of early medieval burial on the period between the fifth and eighth centuries with the later burials being relatively neglected as they were assumed to lie beneath later medieval churchyards. Given the influence of the "final phase" model on the study of middle and late Saxon burial, it is important to examine the development of this model in some detail, before considering the criticisms of some of the model's assumptions raised by recent work.

2.1.1. The formation of the "final phase" model

While the "final phase" model first appeared in the 1930s (Lethbridge 1931 &1936; Leeds 1936), the origins of some of the ideas used in the theory had a much greater antiquity. By the end of the eighteenth century, the work of first Faussett (1856) and then, a generation later, Douglas (1793) in Kent had identified a group of furnished cemeteries that were proving difficult to date (Hawkes 1990:4). Faussett had tentatively proposed a Romano-British or sub-Roman date for the cemeteries on the basis of the Roman coins found in some of the graves, although he also raised the possibility that they might be Anglo-Saxon. Douglas took this a stage further in suggesting that not only were these cemeteries probably of Anglo-Saxon date but, given the presence of coins and Christian artefacts found in some of the graves, that these cemeteries contained the burials of early converts to the new faith, interred in the period following the conversion of Kent and prior to the transition to

churchyard burial (*ibid.*:4).

It was not until the consolidation of chronological and typological sequences in the early twentieth century that these cemeteries could be dated with any degree of confidence and, as a result, were becoming increasingly linked to historical events outlined in the Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Geake 1997:2). However it was only in the 1930s that a so-called "Final Phase" of burial was recognised, as the result of the work of Lethbridge and Leeds (Lucy 2000:182). In the publication of his excavation of a cemetery at Burwell (Ca), Lethbridge questioned the prevalent idea that the conversion to Christianity led to an almost immediate discontinuation of furnished burial and, as such, all grave goods must predate the arrival of Christianity (Lethbridge 1931:82). Pointing to the gap in the chronology this assumption created, he suggested that the newly converted population did not immediately abandon furnished burial and that the practice persisted into the seventh century, but with lower numbers of furnished burials and differences in the type of grave goods used. Although initially questioned by his contemporaries (Kendrick 1933), this model was further refined and repeated by Lethbridge in his publication of the cemetery at Shudy Camps (Lethbridge 1936:27-9). In the same year, a similar argument was put forward in Leeds' *Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (1936). In the concluding chapter, entitled "The Final Phase", he, like Lethbridge, questioned the assumption that the majority of grave goods predated the arrival of Christianity (*ibid.*:96) and suggested that "pagan" customs declined slowly with furnished burial persisting well into the seventh century (*ibid.*:98). Leeds' book and arguments proved popular, with the term "final phase" becoming widely used by the archaeological community in the decades either side of the Second World War (Geake 1997:2). Furthermore, this work was also to establish a trend, one which was to persist well into the 1980s, of viewing changes in mortuary practice of the seventh and eighth centuries as being the result of the introduction of the new faith.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the addition of a new element to the model of the "final phase of furnished burial". In 1963, when publishing the excavations of the two cemeteries at Chamberlain's Barn (Bd), Hyslop, drawing on the work of Leeds and others, listed those characteristics that defined the final phase cemeteries (Hyslop 1963:190-1). Among the characteristics listed, and emphasised fully for the first time, was that many of these cemeteries seemed to have been founded in the seventh century, and that a number lay in the vicinity of an earlier burial ground (*ibid.*:191). This idea of shifting burial location was further explored in the excavation report of the two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Winnall (Ha), with the authors suggesting that these pairs of cemeteries indicated the abandonment of older burial grounds in favour of new sites in the seventh century and that this change in

mortuary behaviour was the result of the introduction of Christianity (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:54). The final element of the "final phase" model came with the suggestion that these shifts in cemetery location as a result of the new faith led to the increasing proximity of burial to settlement sites (Faull 1976:233). The main elements of the final phase model are summarised in table 2.1. Yet how valid is the assumption that underpins the entire model, which is that the introduction of Christianity was solely responsible for the changes in mortuary practices seen in the seventh and eighth centuries?

2.1.2. Reassessing the role of Christianity on early medieval burial practices

For the last millennium, burial and religion, specifically Christianity, have been inextricably intertwined in England to the extent that there is a tendency to assume that this relationship dates back to the introduction of the new faith in the seventh century. Yet while few would dispute that the establishment of churchyard burial in the later Anglo-Saxon period owes much to the machinations of the Church, the traditional view of Christianity as the sole factor responsible for the changes in mortuary behaviour seen in the seventh and eighth centuries has been increasingly questioned (Boddington 1990:194; Halsall 1995:61-3; Hadley 2000a:170). When considering the possible impact of the early Anglo-Saxon Church on burial practices, there are two main issues to address. First is there any evidence that the Church was particularly concerned with how individuals were buried in the seventh and eighth centuries, and secondly, even if the Church wished to dictate the mortuary practices of the native population, was it in a position to do so?

The arrival of Christianity is traditionally seen as a major factor in the decline of furnished burial and the instigator of the rapid adoption of churchyard burial, yet there is little documentary evidence to support this assumption. For while there are seventh- and eighth-century Church laws prohibiting activities, such as divination, fortune-telling (Morris 1989:60) and the use of amulets (Meaney 1981:14), there are no surviving statutes pertaining to the form or location of burial (Geake 1992:89). Although the absence of evidence can never constitute proof, the 'final phase' model implies a rapid transition to churchyard burial, presumably overseen by the Church, and it is a little surprising that no aspect of the process is reflected in the documentary sources of this period (Bullough 1989:185). In fact, the very absence of documentary sources proscribing certain burial rites and locations suggests that the regulation of mortuary behaviour was not a subject of major concern to the early Anglo-Saxon Church, which, by all appearances, was uninterested in the mode or location of burial

Table 2.1. A summary of the main elements of the Final Phase Model

Aspect of mortuary behaviour	Observed changes
Grave goods	Increased numbers of burials are unfurnished or only have a knife
	Changes in the type of grave goods. Weapons are rare with the majority of items linked to dress or in the form of small personal tokens.
	Some objects may have Christian significance
Treatment of the body	All burials are inhumations
	All graves are orientated west-east
Burial location	New cemeteries are established away from existing cemeteries under the influence of the new faith
	These new cemeteries are closer to the settlement
	Some graves are associated with barrows.

(derived from Boddington 1990:181).

Figure 2.1. The pectoral cross from the seventh-century grave of St. Cuthbert
(from Campbell 1980:82)

during the seventh and eighth centuries (Bullough 1989:186), with the notable exception of the prohibition of cremation (*ibid.*:192).

Another factor to consider in the light of the relative dearth of references in ecclesiastical documents pertaining to burial is to what extent the early Anglo-Saxon Church perceived practices such as furnished burial as "pagan". Over a thousand years of churchyard burial has resulted in the assumption that, when present, Christianity was a major factor in determining mortuary behaviour. A similar assumption has been applied to the pre-Christian period with "pagan" beliefs seen as a major factor in determining burial practice (Halsall 1995:61-2). This led to the assumption that there was a specifically defined concept of Christian burial, one which contrasted with intrinsically "pagan" mortuary practices (Bullough 1983:186). Yet there is no evidence to suggest that the Church saw practices such as furnished burial as being specifically "pagan" (Young 1999:74; Blair 2005:59). Indeed, furnished burial in Gaul had its origins in the generation which saw the conversion of the monarchy and aristocracy to Christianity (James 1989:26), with lavishly furnished burials found inside churches such as the Cathedrals of Cologne and St. Denis (Werner 1964). Similarly, the early Anglo-Saxon religious community at Lindisfarne do not appear to have thought that interring a fully clothed St. Cuthbert (died 687AD) with a pectoral cross (figure 2.1), a portable altar and a Gospel book anything less than an appropriate form of burial for the holy man (Campbell 1982:80). This suggests the modern perception of certain practices, such as furnished burial, as being synonymous with "pagan" beliefs was not shared by the early medieval Church, which does not seem to have seen the continued use of grave goods as posing any threat to the articulation of the new faith.

The second factor to consider when assessing the impact of the Church on the burial practices of the seventh and eighth centuries is whether the Anglo-Saxon Church was, in the first centuries of its existence, in a position to dictate the mortuary behaviour of the indigenous population. This requires a brief consideration of the chronology and nature of the conversion process within the Wessex heartlands. This was a process that only affected the eastern part of the heartlands of Wessex, as there was an active Church already present in the western counties of Devon, Dorset and Somerset, when the Augustine missionaries arrived in 597AD (Morris 1989:6). Sources of information on the British Church in the sixth and seventh centuries are sparse (Stancliffe 1999:107). The main documentary source for the seventh century, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*, contains few references to the British Church and these are rarely complimentary (*ibid.*: 108). This is perhaps not surprising as Bede's object in writing the *Ecclesiastical History* was to chart the progress of the Roman Church in converting the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and, as such, the

activities of the British Church were never going to be central to his work. However, the brief references the work contains, such as the account of the two British bishops involved in the consecration of Chad in 664AD (*HE III:28*-Sherley-Price 1990:197), provide brief glimpses of an established Church, with bishops, monasteries and holy places in the western part of the study area (Morris 1989:6). While the implications of different religious traditions of the western and eastern part of the study area on the burial practices are examined in more detail later when considering the development of churchyard burial,[3] for the purposes of the current assessment of the validity of the final phase model this discussion will be restricted to the consideration of the conversion of the eastern part of the study area.

The major source for the conversion of West Saxons, as for the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*, which was completed in 731AD (Sherley-Price 1990). Unfortunately, Bede never left his native Northumbria (Morris 1989:10), and his account of the conversion of the West Saxons, based on information provided by Bishop Daniel of the West Saxons (Sherley-Price 1990:42), is far less detailed than the accounts of the conversion of the kingdoms of Northumbria and Kent. However, there is sufficient information available to construct a chronological framework for the conversion of the West Saxons. The influence of the Roman Church was slow to arrive in the most westerly of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It was not until the 630s, over 30 years after the arrival of the Augustinian mission that missionaries of the Roman Church appear in the kingdom of the West Saxons in the form of the Bishop Birinus (*ASC A 634*-Swanton 2000:26; *HE III:7*-Sherley-Price 1990:153). Furthermore, Birinus, who arrived in England at the direct behest of Pope Honorius I, appears to have been independent of any of the Roman missions already active in the country (*ASC E 634*-Swanton 2000:27; Yorke 1995:158). Birinus, like other missionaries in other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, initially targeted the kings and their courts (Morris 1989:91) and, in 635AD Cynigils, king of the West Saxons, was converted with Birinus being given the city of Dorchester as his episcopal seat (*HE III:7*-Sherley-Price 1990:153; *ASC A 635*-Swanton 2000:26).

Having secured a base for missionary activity and the protection of the newly converted West Saxon king, the scene appeared set to begin the conversion of the wider population, but the few small gains made by the mission were far from secure and were to be short-lived. Cynigils may have converted to the new faith, but this was not the case for his son and successor Coenwalh (*HE III:7*-Sherley-Price 1990:153), who was only converted when exiled from his kingdom, c. 645-8AD (*ibid.*:154; Yorke 1995:172). Coenwalh's restoration

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[3] See chapter 7

to power and his foundation of a second bishopric at Winchester (*HE III:7*-Sherley-Price 1990:154), represented an upturn in the fortunes of the fledgling West Saxon Church. However this proved to be temporary as the departure of Bishop Agilbert from Dorchester in 660AD, followed by the expulsion of Bishop Wine from Winchester, left the kingdom of the West Saxons with no episcopal presence until the appointment of Leutherius in 670AD (Yorke 1995:172). Leutherius' appointment, and consecration by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (*HE III:7*-Sherley-Price 1990:155), marked the beginning of the West Saxon Church's acceptance of the authority of Canterbury (Yorke 1995:172) and the start of an unbroken episcopal succession (*ibid.*:173). Yet there was to be a final twist in the tale before the initial stage of the conversion process could be said to be complete in the kingdom of the West Saxons. In 685AD, a member of the West Saxon royal house, Caedwalla, returned from exile in what was to be a successful attempt to take the throne of Wessex and so became the last non-Christian West Saxon king (Yorke 1995:173). The following year Caedwalla's conquest of the Isle of Wight resulted in the conversion of, in Bede's words "[the] last of all the provinces of Britain, the isle of Wight" to Christianity (*HE IV:16*-Sherley-Price 1990:230-2). Caedwalla abdicated his throne in 688AD, apparently so he could seek baptism in Rome, leaving a nominally Christian kingdom under his successor Ine (Yorke 1995:173).

This pattern of progress and setback seen in the attempts of the missionaries to convert the West Saxon royal house to Christianity and secure an unbroken episcopal succession is not unique to Wessex. Comparable accounts could be provided for many of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Mayr-Harting 1991:29). The picture painted by the accounts of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is one of a new faith seeking to establish a foothold and, as such, caution should be exercised when attributing changes in mortuary behaviour during the seventh and even the eighth century to the introduction of Christianity, as this perhaps gives too much power and influence to the nascent Anglo-Saxon Church in the first centuries of its existence. The Anglo-Saxon Church of the seventh and early eighth centuries was, in essence, a missionary church (Campbell 1982:45) and, as such, could only meet a limited number of priorities. Furthermore, the absence of documentary evidence proscribing specific burial rites or locations would seem to imply that the regulation of funerary practices did not rank highly among them (Geake 1992:89).

A second factor to consider, when assessing the ability of the early Anglo-Saxon Church to determine the mortuary behaviour of the indigenous population, is to ask to what extent the early medieval society of the seventh and eighth centuries could be said to be Christian. The conversion process described in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English people* was

essentially that of the kings and the aristocracy and that took the best part of a century (Mayr-Harting 1991:29). The conversion of the rest of the population was to take centuries. It was only when churches began to proliferate in the later Saxon period, bringing with them resident clergy, that the majority of the population had more than intermittent contact with the Church (Morris 1989:91). As such, it seems difficult to conceive of the Church being able to produce the widespread changes in mortuary behaviour seen in the seventh and eighth centuries by dictating the mode and location of burial given its intermittent contact with what was at best a nominally Christian and at worse an unconverted population. Indeed, it is worth noting that similar changes in mortuary behaviour were also seen in seventh century Gaul, which was converted to Christianity much earlier than Anglo-Saxon England and where the introduction of a new faith cannot be used to explain the transformation of burial practices (Halsall 1995:62). As such, when all the evidence is considered, it seems to suggest that, at least with respect to the burial practices of the seventh and eighth centuries, the introduction of Christianity played a less central role in these changes than once thought (Boddington 1990:198). The seventh and eighth centuries saw fundamental changes in technologies, trade relationships, and social and political structures (Geake 1997:1) and the impact of these factors on mortuary behaviour requires greater consideration (Boddington 1990:198). Yet, this is not to say that introduction of a new faith had no impact on burial practices in the seventh and eighth centuries. Christianity brought with it an alternative to traditional burial practices in the form of new mortuary rituals, new burial locations and new ideas concerning death (Hadley 2000a:159), but it does not appear to have been the instigator of wholesale change in funerary practices that it was once thought to be.

2.2. The nature of burial evidence

"Now at the time when the holy bishop Aethelwold was destined to leave this mortal life and receive from God the rewards for his labours, he came to a town commonly known as Beddington, sixty miles from Winchester. Staying there for a while, he fell seriously ill; he was anointed with the holy oil, and fortified his departure from this life by receiving the Lord's body and blood. And so, bidding farewell to his sons and granting them his peace, he gave up his spirit to heaven while praying..... It is not possible to say what a countless multitude flocked to his funeral. From every direction had assembled rich and poor alike from neighbouring towns and boroughs vying to say their last farewell to their shepherd. It was with grief and bitterness at heart that they all followed behind the bier, precious with its incomparable treasure, armed with the holy gospels and crosses, decked with veiling cloths, protected on each side by lit candles, hymns to God and chanted psalms. When the procession came next day into Winchester, the whole city with one accord met the body..... So the man of God was led in heavenly funeral to the church of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and to his bishop's seat. The solemnities of vigils and masses complete, he was

buried in the crypt to the south of the holy altar, where, as he told me himself, a sign from heaven had long ago shown that he should rest"
(*The life of St. Aethelwold* -Lapidge & Winterbottom 1991: 63)

Wulfstan of Winchester's account of the death and funeral in 984 AD of Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester and one of the key figures in the monastic reform of the tenth century (Yorke 1988), provides a salutary reminder of the incomplete nature of the archaeological data on funerary practices. Usually all that survives in the archaeological record are human remains, either as an inhumation or cremations, and the context within which they were deposited, such as a grave, barrow or funerary urn. Yet, the act of burial represents only one part of a process set in motion by the death of an individual (Härke 1997: 22), a process that would also have encompassed the actual funerary rites and may have included a period of mourning and rites of remembrance, as illustrated in the account above. Even if Aethelwold's grave had survived the destruction of Winchester's Old Minster in the eleventh century (Kjølbye-Biddle 1993:13), his grave would have told us nothing about the masses, the vigils and the processions, which had been an integral part of the funeral. This inability to reconstruct the entire funerary ritual has important implications for any analysis of funerary practices. The nature of the surviving evidence dictates that any archaeological analysis of funerary practice is, in essence, an investigation of the burial of human remains. This bias is unavoidable, and has the result that only the variation apparent in part of the funerary process is examined and there may have been important changes to other parts of the funerary process during the course of the early medieval period (Halsall 1995:1), which cannot be determined from the archaeological record.

A second bias inherent within the material evidence for mortuary practices is caused by the preferential survival of certain materials within the archaeological record. Rare survivals of textiles, such as those found within the tomb of St Cuthbert (Campbell 1982:80), and organic materials, such as the timber coffins from St. Peters, Barton-upon Humber (Li) (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982:301) and Swinegate, York (NYk) (Pearson 1989:7), illustrate that the surviving evidence often represents only part of the funerary furnishings with which the individual was interred. This bias in preservation means that, by necessity, any analysis of funerary provision is based on an incomplete record of the funerary provision originally accorded an individual. Furthermore, the focus on the surviving evidence may inadvertently accord these elements of the funerary rite a greater prominence than they may have originally possessed. Having highlighted some of the inherent biases within the archaeological record with respect to funerary evidence, it is now necessary to consider the ways in which this data has been used in the analyses of early medieval mortuary practices in the past.

2.3. The uses of early medieval burial data

The abundance of burial evidence from the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries resulted in its widespread use in archaeological enquiries both as a source of material culture and as a means of making inferences about the societies of that period (Härke 1997:19), in effect using the analysis of burial practices as a means of understanding the world of the living though their treatment of the dead. As such it is necessary to determine what inferences about society can justifiably be drawn from burial practices.

Early studies tended to correlate the burial practice accorded an individual with that individual's social role or with the economic power of the deceased due to a basic underlying assumption that death was a direct reflection of life (Arnold 1980; Härke 1997:20). However, funerary provision cannot be viewed as an objective representation of the world of the living but rather is determined by what was considered appropriate to include within a mortuary context (Parker Pearson 1999:10). Mortuary deposits, unlike many archaeological deposits, do not represent the discarded items of a living society. Instead, the composition of the contents of the grave and its construction are the product of a series of decisions made by the mourners (James 1989:23; Lucy 1999:37). These choices would, in part, have been constrained by contemporary beliefs, customs, tradition and practical considerations such as availability of specific items, but choice was still possible (Härke 1997:23). This selection process means graves should not be seen as a direct reflection of past individuals or societies but rather, at best, an indirect reflection of the world of the living distorted by the ideology and individual choices made by the mourners (Parker Pearson 1982:101). Furthermore, even if burial is seen as a reflection, however distorted, of an individual, each individual has multiple dimensions, such as age, sex, personal achievement, rank and social position (Parker Pearson 1999:29), and it is difficult to discern which aspects were deemed to be worthy of representation or, indeed, if all were represented (Crawford 1999:19). In addition, those aspects of an individual emphasised by the mourners may only have been emphasised in death and not in life (Lucy 1999: 37). Also, it is clear that the mourners often had quite localised and continually changing ideas of what rites were deemed appropriate for an individual (Lucy 1999: 33). These factors combine to make even the most simple inference from burial data far from straightforward (Härke 1997: 24) and serve to highlight the need for a greater understanding of the factors determining the type of funerary provision accorded an individual.

The very complexity of burial data has important implications for the design of this study. It

is clear that a systematic survey of the archaeological evidence for early medieval burial is an essential prerequisite to the understanding of the mortuary behaviour of the often neglected period c.600–1100AD and the extent to which it was influenced by the introduction of Christianity. In addition, such a survey needs to establish both the scope of burial practices and how this behaviour varies with respect to known chronological, geographical and demographic variables. Furthermore, given the often fragmentary nature of burial evidence, it is essential that all aspects of mortuary deposits are examined. Any analysis must consider not just grave goods and the evidence for coffins and grave linings, but also variables such as body position and grave orientation. In addition, there has long been a tendency when analysing early medieval burial data to divide the data chronologically and geographically by separating the study of the more traditional "Anglo-Saxon" type burials from the burial data from the so-called "Celtic fringe". This analysis take a slightly different approach, as the initial stages of all analyses will include the entire dataset, irrespective of date or geographical location. It is felt that rather than imposing arbitrary divisions onto the data, it would more advantageous to identify variations within the data and then determine if there is any geographical or chronological basis for these differences. Also, by conducting a comprehensive survey of the burial data within the Wessex heartlands, this research will provide a greater understanding of funerary practices between c.600-1100AD and allow the burial data to be used to address wider issues, specifically the influence of an increasingly powerful Anglo-Saxon Church on burial practices.

Chapter 3

Beyond the pale:

the identification and assessment of the early medieval burial data from Wessex

One hundred and fifty years of investigation into Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices has seen the production of a number of surveys on the archaeological evidence for early medieval burial at both a national (Meaney 1964; Geake 1997; Stoodley 1999a) and regional level (Welch 1983; Arnold 1982a; Dickinson 1976; Lucy 1998). However, there has been a tendency for these surveys to focus primarily on the furnished burials of the early and mid Anglo-Saxon periods. With the notable exception of Jo Buckberry's work (2004) on later Saxon burials in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, comprehensive surveys of the later burials of the ninth to eleventh centuries are largely absent. Moreover, many surveys that do extend into the later Anglo-Saxon period tend to focus on particular categories of burial, such as those that reuse prehistoric barrows (Williams 1997) and "execution" cemeteries (Reynolds 1999b). In addition, the absence of grave goods in the western counties of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, has often led to the early medieval burials in these areas being overlooked in any consideration of the mortuary practice in this period (Lucy & Reynolds 2002a:11).

There was no extant database of early medieval burials that covers the period c.450-1100AD and also included the western counties of Devon, Dorset and Somerset. This made a comprehensive survey of the archaeological data an essential prerequisite of any investigation into early medieval burial practices in the Wessex area. This chapter outlines the criteria and methods used in the collection of data for this study. In addition, the quantitative and qualitative nature of the data obtained is considered.

3.1. The identification of early medieval burial sites in Wessex

Site data was obtained through searches of both the National Monuments Record (NMR) and all local Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) within the study area (table 3.1). The data was augmented using existing national and local gazetteers (table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Sources consulted in the completion of this data set

Area	Sites and Monuments Record	Gazetteers
National	National Sites and Monuments record	Meaney 1964 Geake 1997 O'Brien 1999
Berkshire	West Berkshire SMR Reading SMR Windsor & Maidenhead SMR Wokingham SMR	Dickinson 1976 Peake 1931
Devon	Devon SMR Exeter SMR	-
Dorset	Dorset SMR	-
Hampshire	Hampshire SMR Portsmouth SMR Southampton SMR Winchester SMR	-
Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight SMR	Arnold 1982
Oxfordshire (south of Thames only)	Oxfordshire SMR	Dickenson 1976
Somerset*	Somerset SMR North Somerset SMR West Somerset SMR Dartmoor SMR	-
Wiltshire	Wiltshire SMR	

Table 3.2: Burial sites in Wessex area identified in this survey

County or District	Number of sites with burials of early medieval or unknown date
Berkshire	40
Devon	9
Dorset	85
Hampshire	107
Isle of Wight	19
Oxfordshire (South of the Thames)	43
Somerset	61
Wiltshire	153
Total	517

The survey included any sites that dated between c.450 and 1100AD and any burials of unknown and possible, but not definite, early medieval date. The main criterion for a site's inclusion within the dataset was the presence of human remains, either articulated or disarticulated. In areas where bone preservation was known to be poor, such as in parts of Devon, the presence of clearly distinguishable grave cuts was also deemed to be sufficient grounds for inclusion. Although isolated finds of early medieval metalwork, such as spearheads and brooches, can often be indicative of the presence of fifth- to seventh-century burials, these find spots of isolated metal objects were not incorporated into the dataset as sites unless there was substantial additional evidence for the presence of burials.

3.2. Assessing the burial evidence from early medieval Wessex

Having collected the evidence for early medieval burial practices within the Wessex area, it is important to consider the qualitative and quantitative nature of the data identified as this can have important implications for the study. This section provides a general overview of the archaeological evidence, first by considering the geographical and chronological distribution of the sites identified and then by examining the quality of the available burial data. Finally, this section considers the impact of the available archaeological evidence on the research design.

3.2.1. The geographical distribution of the sites identified in Wessex

Using the methods outlined above, a total of 517 sites were identified as being of definite or possible early medieval date (table 3.2). There is significant variation in the number of sites identified within the different counties comprising the study area. This is, in part, related to geographical size with smaller counties, such as Isle of Wight, having significantly fewer sites than the larger counties of Wiltshire and Hampshire. However, the number of sites identified is not simply a factor of the geographical size of a county as, for example, the relatively small county of Dorset has a comparatively high number of sites while Devon, one of the larger counties in the study area exhibits a virtual dearth of them. The other factors which may affect site density can be loosely grouped into three general categories, the population density during the early medieval period, the archaeological visibility of sites and the chance of sites being discovered.

Figure 3.1. Population distribution within the study area in 1086 based on Domesday Book entries
(from Yorke 1995:275)

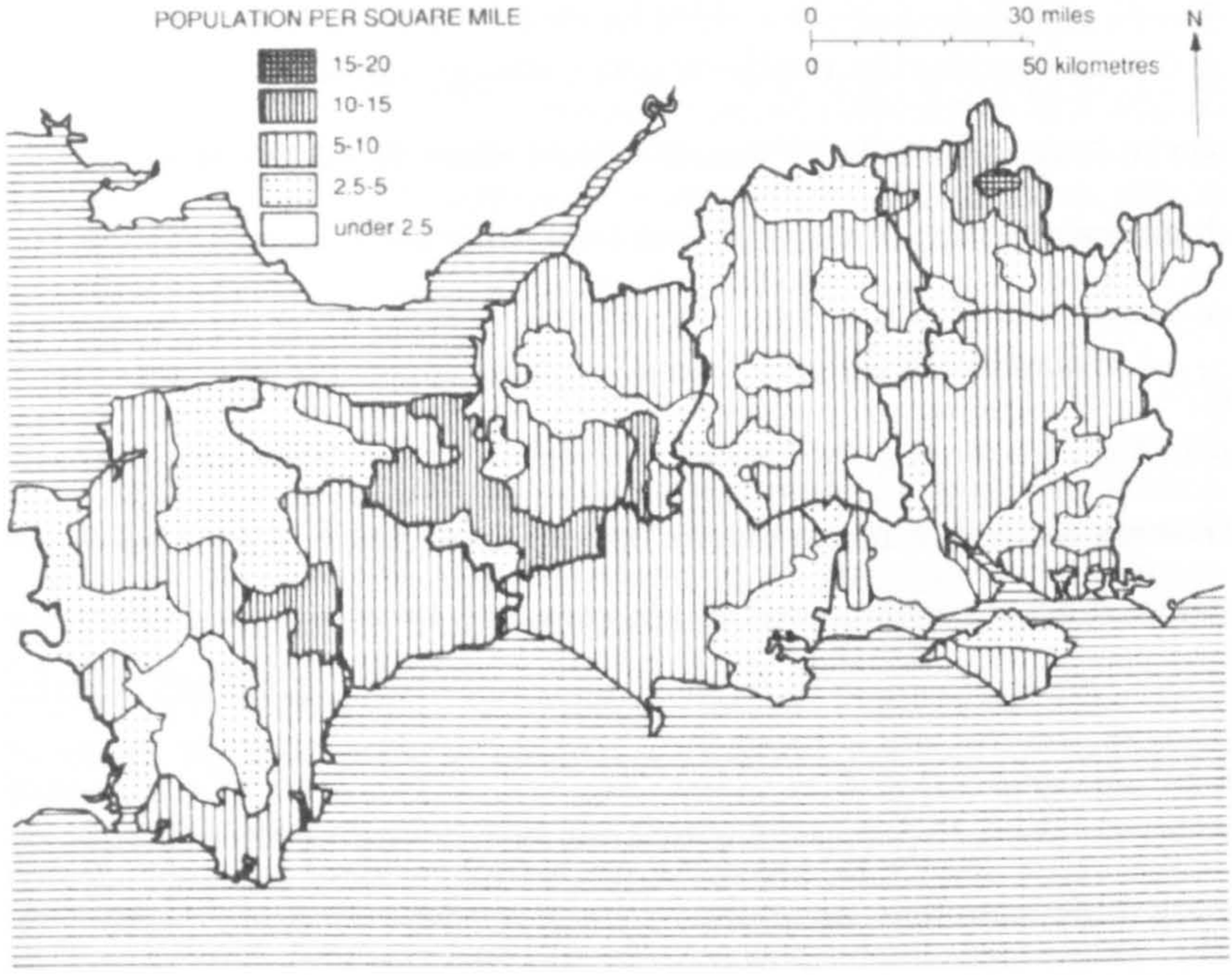
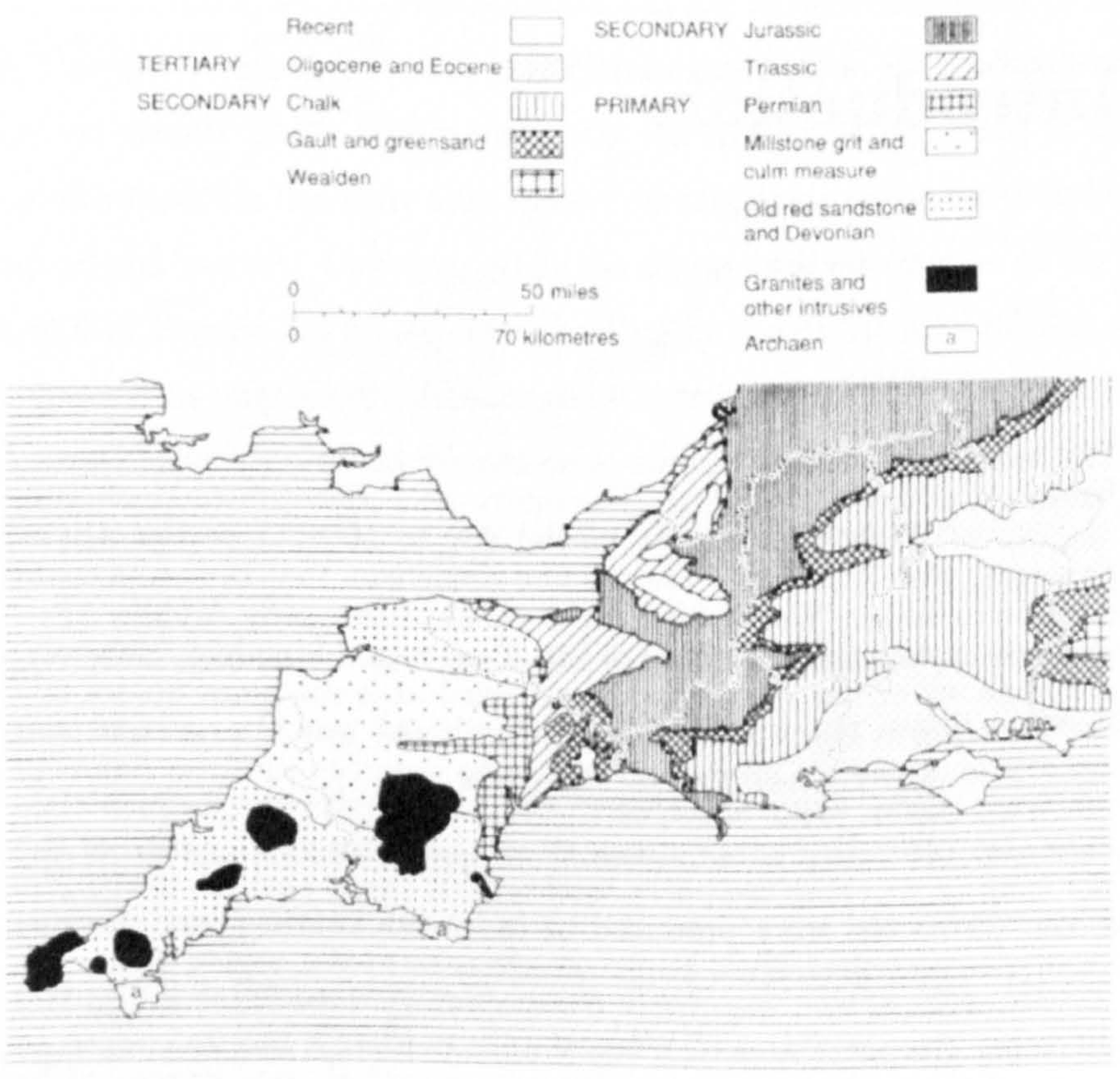


Figure 3.2. Geological map of the study area (from Yorke 1995: 2)



3.2.1.1. Early medieval population density and the distribution of burial evidence.

Population density, and thus the distribution of burial evidence, during the early medieval period was closely linked to the landscape and its potential for exploitation. The landscape of the Wessex area exhibits marked variation (Yorke 1995:274) and this would have been reflected in variations in population density. Lands with limited potential for exploitation – such as the acidic moorlands of Exmoor and Dartmoor, the higher ground of the Quantocks, the heathlands of Dorset and Hampshire, and heavily wooded areas, such as the forests of Savernake and Selwood – are likely to have had lower population densities than seen elsewhere in the Wessex area (figure 3.1) (*ibid.*:275; Hooke 1998:223). This, in turn, is reflected in burial density and offers, at least, a partial explanation for the lower number of sites observed in the west of Hampshire, and in the upland and moorland areas of Devon and Somerset. The clusters of sites in the Winchester and Southampton areas is, in part, a product of high population density as a result of their emergence as major urban centres during the later Saxon period. Finally, it is also important to remember that the landscape's potential for human exploitation may change over time as the result of human activities or natural forces. For example, during the early medieval period, the Somerset Levels consisted of a network of islands and marshes, with human habitation on this marginal land mainly confined to the higher and drier ground of the islands. Since the medieval period, improved drainage and the construction of flood defences has led to the reclamation of much of the marshland. This has increased the land's potential for exploitation and markedly changed the distribution and density of the later populations. As such, it is important to consider the distribution of sites within the study area against the landscape of the early medieval period and not that of later periods. However, while the density and distribution of the population of early medieval Wessex has an important bearing on the distribution of sites seen in the study area, it is not the only major influence and it is necessary to consider other factors.

3.2.1.2. Site visibility and burial evidence in the Wessex heartlands

The archaeological visibility of any site is determined by the level of preservation of the archaeological record. Given that the main criterion for site identification used in this survey is the presence of human skeletal remains, any factors affecting the survival of skeletal material would also influence the distribution of sites. The implications of the differing levels of bone preservation are well illustrated by the late Roman and post-Roman cemetery discovered in the Kenn area of South Devon (Weddell 2000). Of the 111 graves identified cut into sandstone, only 5 contained any fragments of human bone (*ibid.*:116). In the absence of the rock-cut graves, the chances of this site having been identified are

minimal. The preservation of human bones can vary significantly not only between sites but also within a single site, reflecting the complexity of the interactions between skeletal remains and the burial environment (Henderson 1987:43). While many of the specifics governing bone preservation remain to be elucidated, factors such as soil pH, soil temperature, the activities of soil dwelling bacteria and the availability of water have been demonstrated to be important (Mays 1998:17). Of these, soil pH and the availability of water, which are in part determined by geological and topographical features, are most likely to affect the distribution of sites within the study area.

Soil pH is an important factor in determining bone preservation. The inorganic matrix of bone is relatively insoluble in neutral or alkali conditions, but becomes increasingly more soluble in acidic conditions. As a result, bone survival is significantly better in soils with an alkaline or neutral pH as opposed to acid soils (Henderson 1987: 46). The characteristics of soil, such as pH, are to a large extent determined by its "parent" rock (Monkhouse 1954:366). As such, variations in soil pH will to some extent reflect variations in the underlying geology of the study area (figure 3.2), which may provide some explanation for some of the variations in site density seen across the Wessex area. For example, the granite that underlies much of the Dartmoor area of Devon contains the only igneous rocks within the study area (Edmonds *et al.* 1975:44). The acidic soils associated with the granite often result in poor skeletal preservation which, at least in part, provides some explanation of the low number of sites identified in this part of Devon. Equally the greater density of sites in the eastern part of the study area is at least partially attributable to its chalk geology. This area is dominated by the chalk uplands of Salisbury Plain, and the Berkshire, Malborough and Dorset Downs, stretching from Berkshire in the north across much of Hampshire, Wiltshire and eastern Dorset (Melville & Freshney 1982:6; Yorke 1995:1)(figure 3.2). As a form of limestone, chalk soils are often base-rich (Jarvis *et al* 1984:40) and large areas of the Downs are characterised by base or neutral soils (*ibid.*:84), providing ideal conditions for the preservation of bone. However, the pH, as with other soil characteristics, is not determined by the underlying geology alone, but rather is the result of the interaction between geology, climate, topography, hydrology and the ecosystem, including human activities (*ibid.*:40). This means that while much of the soil overlaying the chalk downland has a neutral or base pH, the interaction of these other factors results in acidic downland soils in some areas (*ibid.*:84). This may contribute to the variations seen in the distribution of sites within the chalk area of the eastern part of the study area.

The availability of water is another important factor governing levels of bone preservation. Water provides a medium for the exchange of ions to and from skeletal material and its

presence is an essential requirement for the survival of micro-organsisms involved in the breakdown of bone (Mays 1998:21). Generally, an excess of water is most deleterious to bone survival due to the leaching of the mineral component of bone into the surrounding water, and as such skeletal preservation is usual good in well drained soils while much poorer in waterlogged soils (Henders0n 1987:46). While the availability of water, like soil pH, is in part determined by the nature of the underlying geology, it is far more affected by very localised factors, such as topography, drainage conditions and distribution of vegetation, making even the most generalised predictions on its effect on site distribution within the study area problematic.

While the level of skeletal preservation is clearly important in the identification of sites, it is not the only factor that may affect the archaeological visibility of a site. For just as the rock-cut graves enhanced the visibility of the site at Kenn (Dv)(see above) the presence of other forms of archaeological evidence associated with the burial can serve the same purpose even when skeletal preservation is good. The sixth-century cemetery recently excavated at Breamore (Ha) was initially located from the remains of a Byzantine bronze bucket and an iron spearhead found using a metal detector (Berkshire Archaeology Services 2001). This is far from unusual, with a large number of fifth- to seventh-century sites having been identified by initial finds of grave goods. It is, however, important to note that any benefits in the identification of sites conferred by the presence of grave goods, is confined only to the eastern half of the study area. The characteristic furnished burials of the fifth- to seventh-century seen further to the east are generally absent in the western counties of Somerset, Devon and Dorset, although a few furnished burials are found in eastern Dorset and Somerset, such as at Bargates (Do) (Jarvis 1983),Wimbourne St Giles (Do) (Meaney 1964:81-2) and Camerton (So) (Horne 1928 & 1932). This may be a contributory factor to the comparatively lower numbers of sites identified in Somerset and Devon.

The lack of grave goods does not seem to have adversely affected the process of site identification in Dorset, which has a comparatively large number of sites for a relatively small county and this may, in part, be due to another type of archaeological evidence enhancing the visibility of early medieval burials. The prehistoric barrows, hillforts and henges scattered across the Wessex landscape, often have associated burials of early medieval date (Williams 1997). Among the sites identified in the survey, 214 (41.4%) were associated with prehistoric, Roman or early medieval monuments or structures. Of these sites, 153 (71.5%) were associated with barrows (figure 3.3). In 76.6 % of these examples, the burials were interred within the barrow, either as primary burials in early medieval barrows or as secondary burials in prehistoric barrows (figure 3.4). At 19.6% of the

Figure 3.3. Frequency of Prehistoric and Roman monuments associated with sites identified in this survey[i]

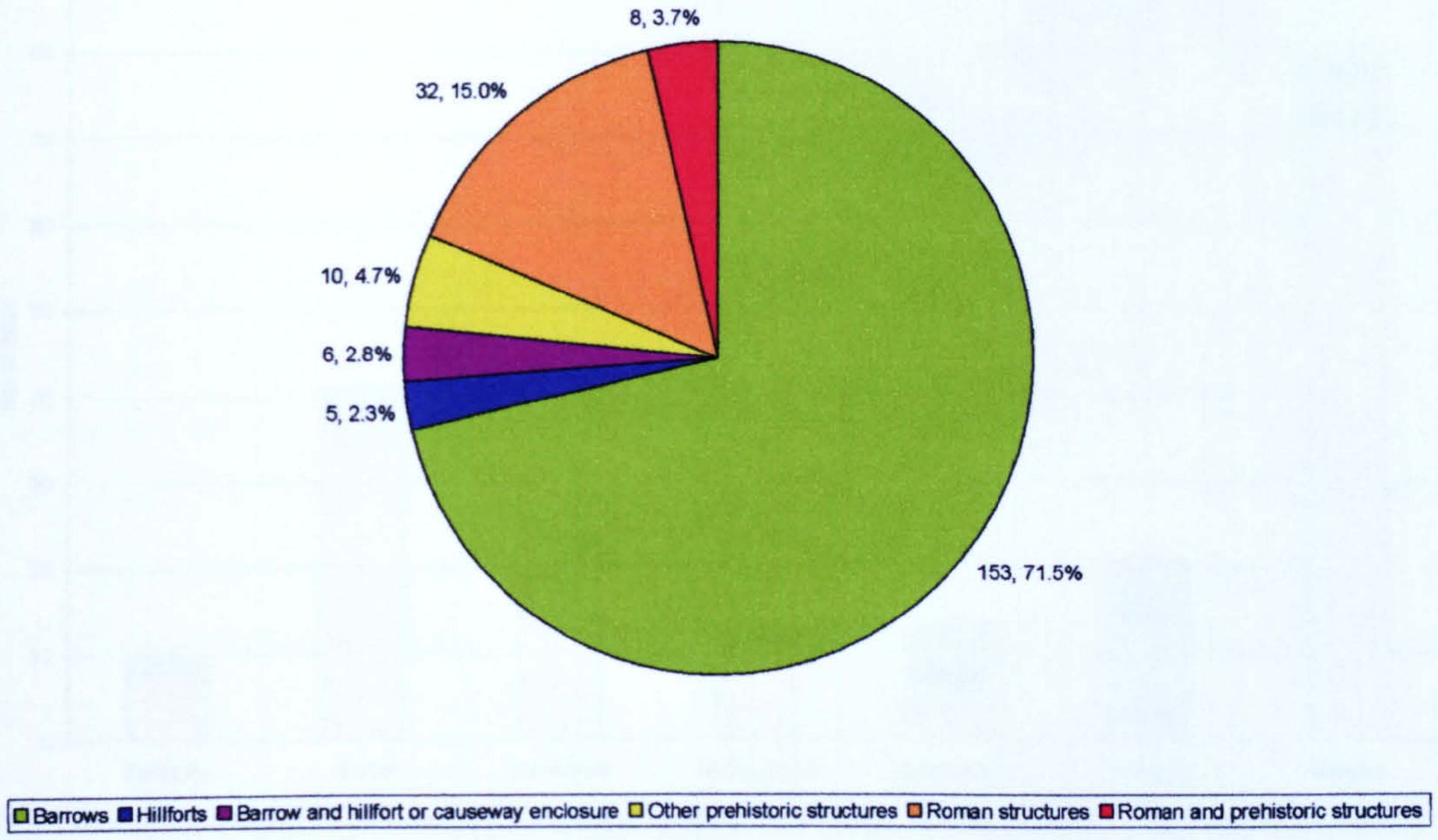
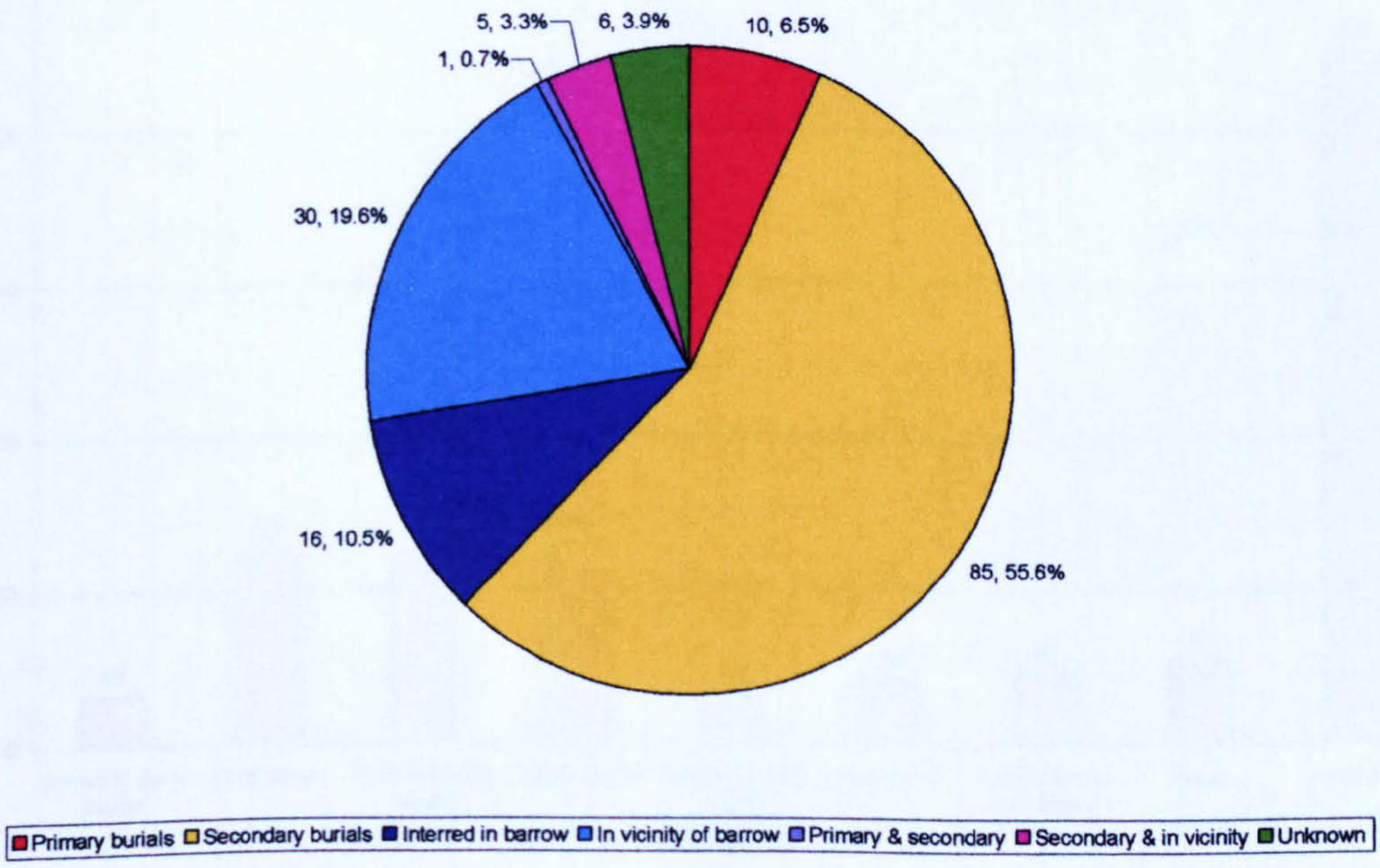


Figure 3.4. Spatial relationship of burials to barrows at sites within the study area[i]



[i] Labels on charts give no. of sites, followed by percentage

Figure 3.5. Number of sites associated with prehistoric monuments by county

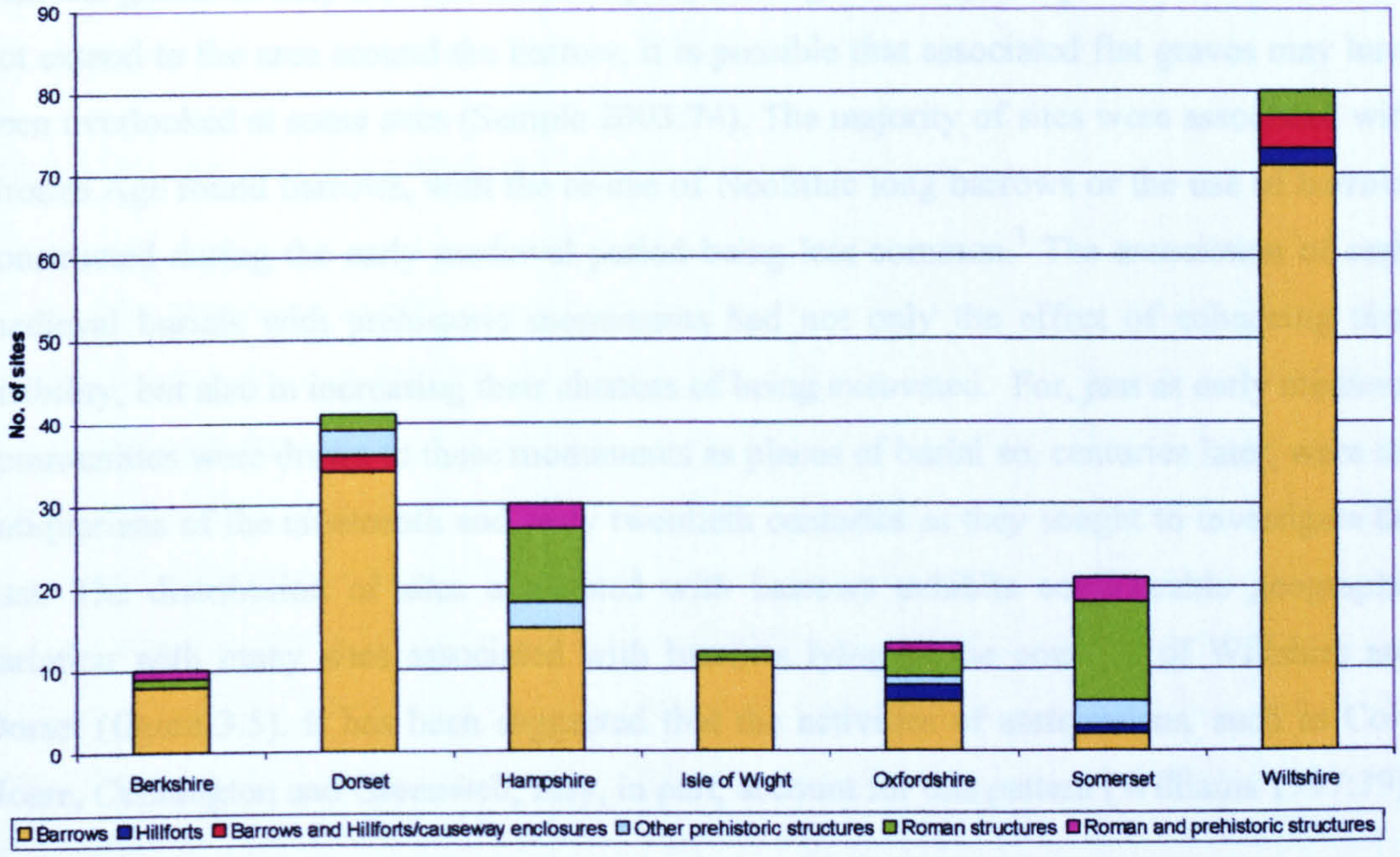
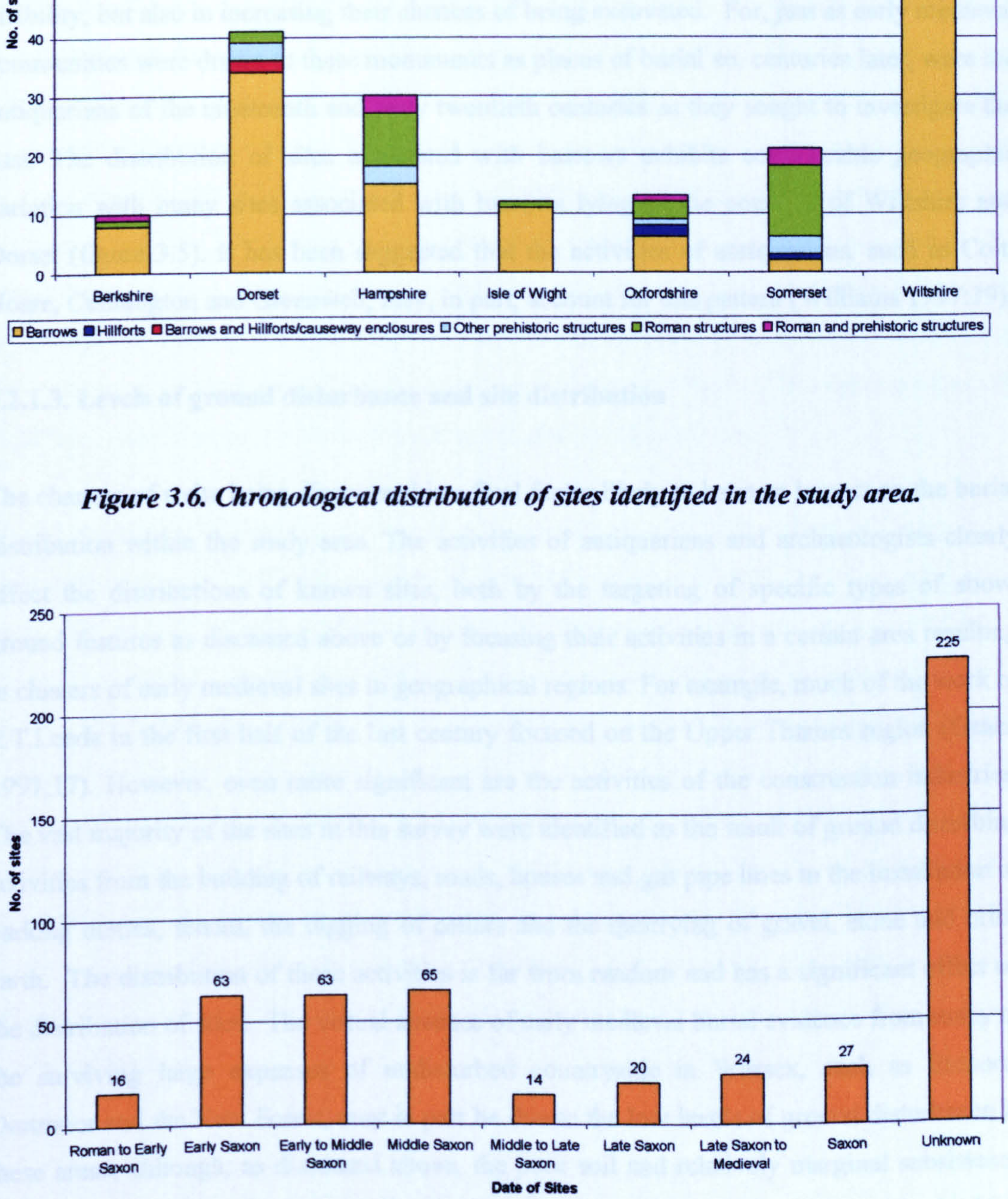


Figure 3.6. Chronological distribution of sites identified in the study area.



sites, the burials lay, not within barrows, but in their general vicinity, with the barrow often providing the focus for a cemetery. The secondary barrow burials were found in association with flat graves in only 3.3% of the examples, although as many antiquarian excavations did not extend to the area around the barrow, it is possible that associated flat graves may have been overlooked at some sites (Semple 2003:74). The majority of sites were associated with Bronze Age round barrows, with the re-use of Neolithic long barrows or the use of barrows constructed during the early medieval period being less common.[1] The association of early medieval burials with prehistoric monuments had not only the effect of enhancing their visibility, but also in increasing their chances of being excavated. For, just as early medieval communities were drawn to these monuments as places of burial so, centuries later, were the antiquarians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they sought to investigate the past. The distribution of sites associated with barrows exhibits considerable geographic variation with many sites associated with barrows lying in the counties of Wiltshire and Dorset (figure 3.5). It has been suggested that the activities of antiquarians, such as Colt-Hoare, Cunnington and Greenwell, may, in part, account for this pattern (Williams 1997:19).

3.2.1.3. Levels of ground disturbance and site distribution

The chances of a site being discovered is a final factor likely to have an impact on the burial distribution within the study area. The activities of antiquarians and archaeologists clearly affect the distributions of known sites, both by the targeting of specific types of above ground features as discussed above or by focusing their activities in a certain area resulting in clusters of early medieval sites in geographical regions. For example, much of the work of E.T.Leeds in the first half of the last century focused on the Upper Thames region (Geake 1997:17). However, even more significant are the activities of the construction industries. The vast majority of the sites in this survey were identified as the result of ground disturbing activities from the building of railways, roads, houses and gas pipe lines to the installation of parking metres, fences, the digging of cellars and the quarrying of gravel, stone and brick earth. The distribution of these activities is far from random and has a significant effect on the distribution of sites. The virtual absence of early medieval burial evidence from many of the surviving large expanses of undisturbed countryside in Wessex, such as Exmoor, Dartmoor and the New Forest, may in part be due to the low levels of ground disturbance in these areas, although, as discussed above, the poor soil and relatively marginal subsistence offered by some of these locations may also be a contributory factor. Equally, the high

[1] The sixth century burials from Overton Down provided the only example of a re-used Roman barrow within the study area (Eagles 1986).

numbers of early medieval burials discovered in the urban centres of Winchester and Southampton (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992; Scull 2001) owes much to the extensive post-war redevelopment of their city centres.

3.2.2. Chronological Distribution of sites

Given that the sites identified by the survey had been discovered and excavated over the course of more than two centuries, it would have been surprising if there had not been some discrepancies in the dating of some sites. In an attempt to minimise this, the dating for each site was examined and, if appropriate, modified. Wherever possible, original radiocarbon results were re-calibrated using the OxCal program v.3.10. In some instances, re-calibration was not possible and these radiocarbon dates are distinguished from the re-calibrated dates using an asterisk. Where sites had been dated stratigraphically, the dates assigned by the excavator were used, unless there were strong grounds to question and/or modify the date. Where the dating was based on grave goods, the date assigned by the excavator was taken unless more recent analyses of the site or the type of artefacts used to date the site suggested a different date. The date of each site is given in the gazetteer of sites.

The chronological distribution of sites identified in this survey is illustrated in figure 3.6. It clearly demonstrates that while a comparatively large number of sites can be securely dated to the fifth to early seventh centuries, this number decreases significantly for the later part of the early medieval period. Furthermore, a large proportion of sites have not been dated with any degree of certainty. The pattern of chronological distribution of sites seen in the early medieval burial data from Wessex is not unique to the study area. An analysis of early medieval burial data in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire demonstrates a similar pattern of high numbers of fifth- to early seventh-century burials and also of burials of unknown date (Buckberry 2004). However, while there was also a much lower number of sites securely dated to the eighth to eleventh centuries, this period is better represented than among the Wessex data, perhaps reflecting the impact of recent work on later Saxon burials in the northern Danelaw.[2]

3.2.2.1. Dating methods and the chronological distribution of sites within the study area

[2] Recently dated and/or published sites in the northern Danelaw include Kirkdale (NYk) (Rahtz & Watts 1997), Addingham (WYk) (Adams 1996), Crayke (NYk) (Adams 1990), Flixborough (Li) (Loveluck 1998), Fillingham (Li) (Buckberry & Hadley 2001), Whitton (Li) (Hadley 2003 & 2004b),York Minister (Phillips & Heywood 1995a &b), Ripon (NYk) (Hall & Whyman 1996)

The uneven chronological distribution of sites identified in the survey is, in part, the result of the different methods used for dating. The large number of securely dated early sites is largely due to the presence of furnished burials in the eastern counties during the fifth to early seventh centuries. This allows these burials to be dated using the typology and seriation of grave goods (Stoodley 1999a:15). These methodologies are not without some problems, for example the acquisition of personal possession during the course of a life means that the date of manufacture of objects interred with an individual may span several decades or more (Geake 1997:7). Despite these problems, many items found in furnished burials can be dated to within a century and a number of grave goods, such as items of female jewellery, can be dated to within half a century. The importance of grave goods in the dating of early cemeteries is well illustrated by a comparison of the chronological distribution of securely dated cemeteries in the three western counties within the study area – Devon, Somerset and Dorset – where furnished burials are rare, with those eastern counties of Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Isle of Wight and Oxfordshire, south of the Thames (figure 3.7). While there are significantly more known sites in the eastern part of the study, it is important to note that much of this disparity in numbers is due to the markedly higher number of early and middle Saxon sites in the eastern counties. These are the very sites in the eastern counties, which can usually be dated using grave goods, which accompany many of the burials.[3] During the same period in the western counties, furnished burials are very unusual[4] and sites often can only be dated using radiocarbon methods, the cost of which can be prohibitive. In contrast, once the use of grave goods declines during the late seventh and early eighth centuries there is less of a discrepancy between the western and eastern parts of the study area.

Determining the date of unfurnished burials is problematic. In some cases, particularly within urban settlements, burials may be dated on stratigraphic grounds, such as at Barnstaple where a late Saxon cemetery is sealed by the bailey bank of the Norman Castle (Miles 1986a). Otherwise, the only method available of securely dating unfurnished burials is radiocarbon dating (Geake 1997:7). However, this method of absolute dating is not without inherent problems particularly in the resolution of the dates obtained. Radiocarbon dates quoted with one standard deviation of 50 years give a possible date range of 200 years at a 95% probability level and this is comparatively well resolved. In addition, the cost of

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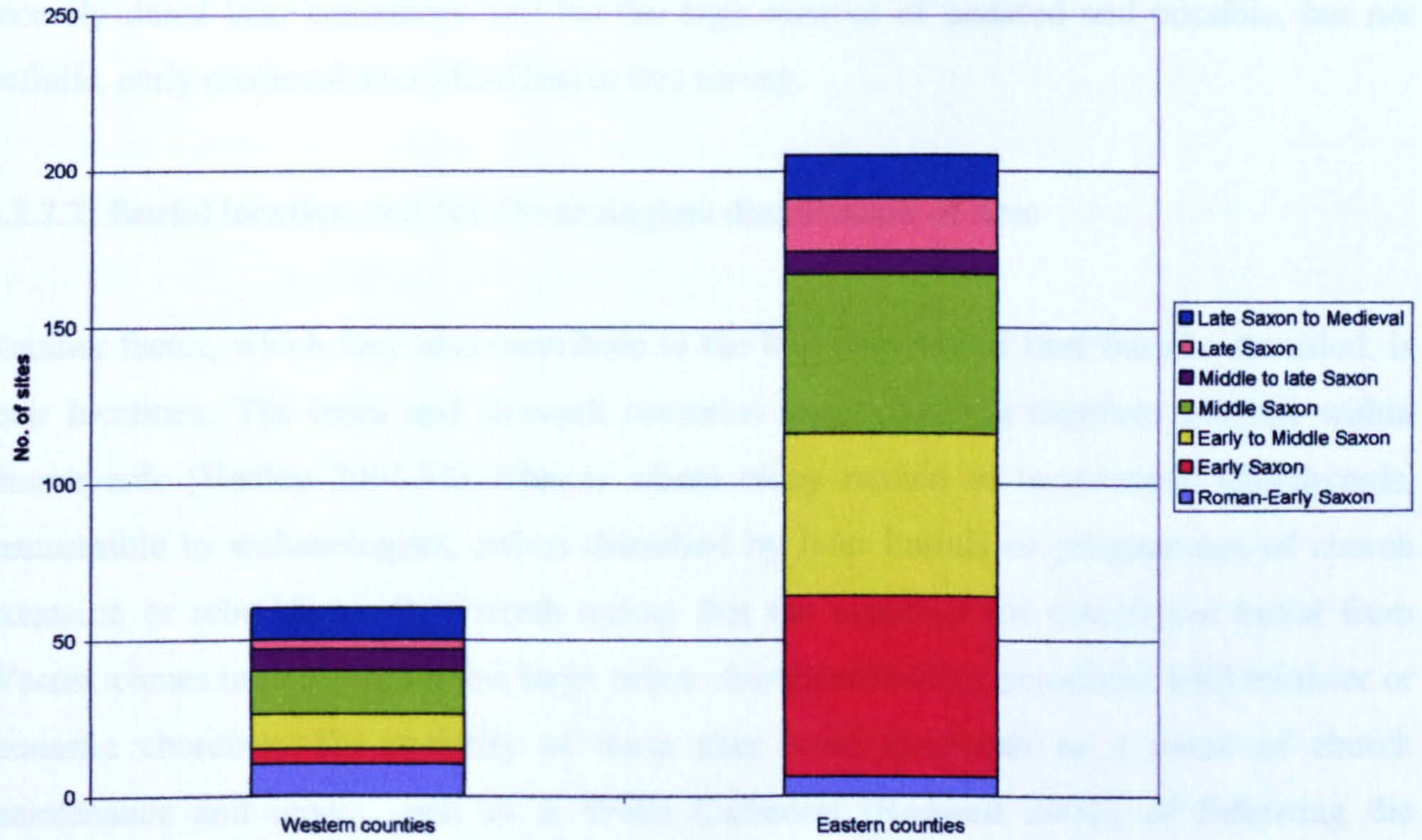
[3] It should be noted that the presence of grave goods may also increase the visibility of burials, see discussion in section 3.2.1.2.

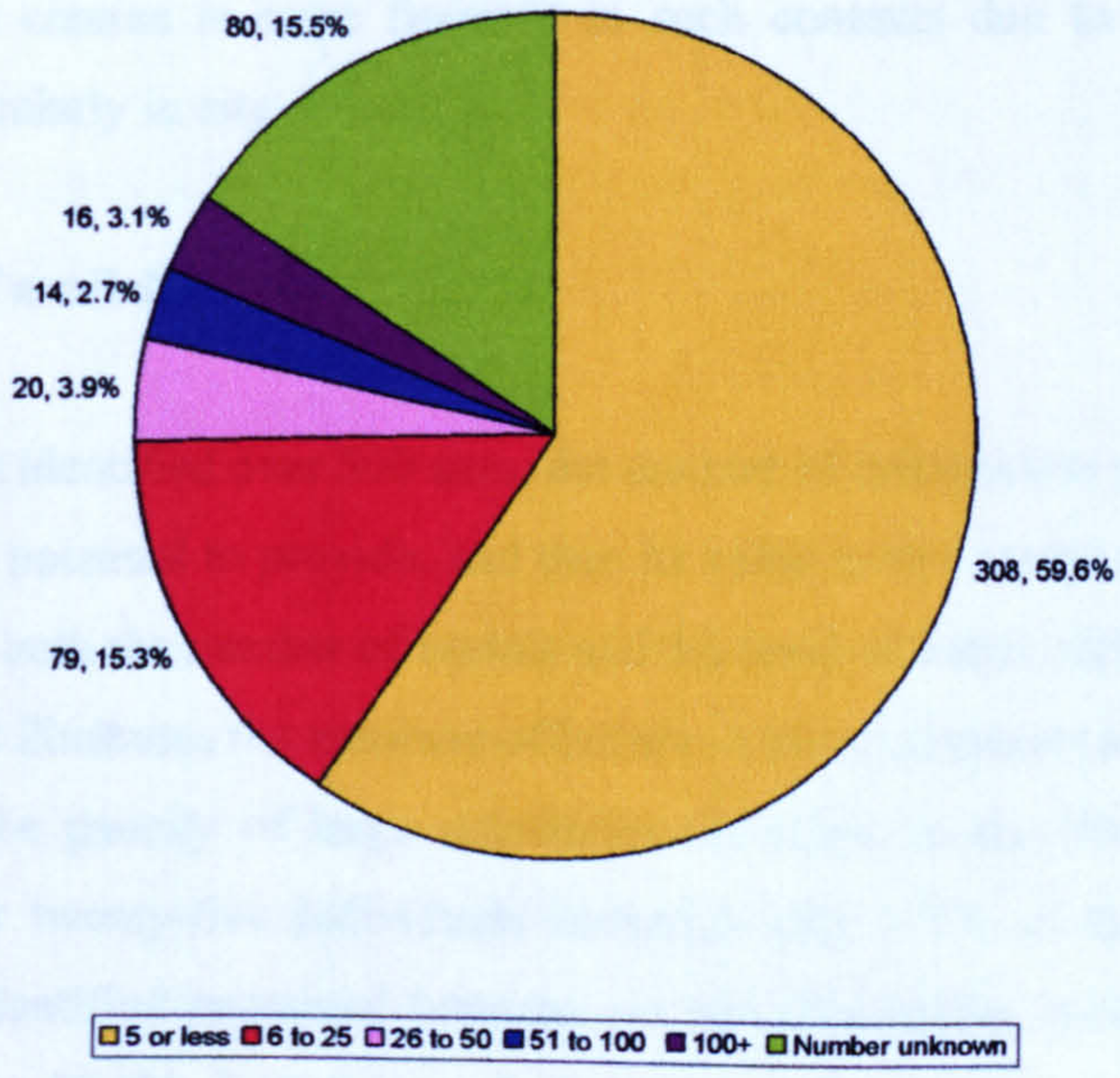
[4] Examples of furnished burials in the western counties can be found at Bradford Peverell (Do)(Hawthorne *pers. comm.*), Trumpet Major Dorchester (Do) (Green 1984), Cannington (So) (Rahtz *et al.* 2000), Camerton (So)(Horne 1928 & 1932), Buckland Dinham (So)(Horne 1926)

Figure 3.7. Comparison of chronological distribution of sites identified in the western and eastern parts of the study area*



* The eastern part of the study area consists of the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire (south of the Thames) and Wiltshire. The western part of the study area consists of the counties of Devon, Dorset and Somerset

Figure 3.8. Size of sites identified in this survey measured by number of inhumation and/or cremation burials



the method can be prohibitive and as such the method is often only used to date larger cemeteries, with isolated burials or small numbers of graves remaining undated due to insufficient funds (Geake 1997:7). This accounts, at least in part, for both the lack of securely dated later cemeteries and for the high number of undated and possible, but not definite, early medieval sites identified in this survey.

3.2.2.2. Burial location and the chronological distribution of sites

Another factor, which may also contribute to the low numbers of later burials identified, is their locations. The tenth and eleventh centuries saw increasing numbers interred within churchyards (Hadley 2001:37). This is where many remain in consecrated churchyards, inaccessible to archaeologists, unless disturbed by later burials or programmes of church extension or rebuilding. It is worth noting that the evidence for churchyard burial from Wessex comes mainly from a few large urban churchyards often associated with minister or monastic churches. The majority of these sites were excavated as a result of church maintenance and repair, such as at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001), or following the development of adjacent land, once, but no longer part of the church's cemetery, such as at Bath Abbey (Bradley- Lovekin 1999). The ongoing maintenance of ageing buildings is not a problem confined only to large urban churches. Yet at least in Wessex, the scale of excavations resulting from the maintenance of lesser churches is significantly smaller, such as the excavations undertaken prior to drainage work at All Saints Church, Sutton Mandeville, Wiltshire, which uncovered three graves (A.C. Archaeology 1999). In addition, the development of land which may once have been part of a church's cemetery, while again not unique to urban centres is more frequent in such contexts due to greater levels of redevelopment, particularly in city centres.

3.2.3. The quality of available data

While this survey has identified over 500 sites, the amount of information on burial practices that each site has the potential to provide, and thus its value to this study, is highly variable. This is dependant on both the number of burials and the level of detail with which they were recorded. Figure 3.8 illustrates the numbers of burials, both inhumations and cremations, by site and highlights the paucity of large cemeteries identified in the Wessex area, where cemeteries with over twenty-five individuals comprise only 9.7% of the sites identified. 15.5% of the sites identified contained between six and twenty-five individuals while the majority of the sites, 59.6%, had five or less burials with a large proportion of these containing single burials.

The predominance of sites with relatively low numbers is a reflection of both the mortuary practices of the period and the result of archaeological activity. Two long-recognised elements of middle Saxon burial behaviour provide at least a partial explanation for the high number of sites with only a few burials. The first of these is the association between prehistoric barrows and early medieval burials. However, some barrows were the foci of at times quite large cemeteries, such as the seventh- to tenth-century cemetery of 88 individuals associated with a long barrow at Bevis Grave (Ha) (Rudkin 2001). The majority of barrows (69.3%) excavated in the Wessex area were associated with between one and five burials (figure 3.9), usually in the form of primary or secondary interments. A second factor is the large numbers of relatively short-lived, and usually small, middle Saxon field cemeteries (Hadley 2001:21).

The high proportion of sites with low numbers of burials is also the result of the limited scale of many excavations, which often result in only the partial excavation of potentially large cemetery sites. This results in the excavation of only a few burials from what may potentially be a much larger cemetery. For example, the small-scale excavations required for the installation of parking meters on the road outside St. Mary's church in Southampton resulted in the recovery of the remains of two individuals (Smith 1995). These burials were of early medieval date and were part of the much larger churchyard associated with St. Mary's Church (*ibid.*: 259). One possible approach when dealing with the variations in cemetery size in this dataset would be to focus only on the larger cemeteries as this would allow data on a large number of burials to be collected by considering a relatively small number of sites. However, one of the central aims of the present study is to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of early medieval burial practices and, in order to do so, it is vital that isolated inhumations and small clusters of burials, some of which are part of much larger cemeteries, are incorporated within the framework of this analysis.

A far more important factor in determining the extent to which a site could be used in this analysis was the quality of the data available, which varies significantly between sites. This is often a reflection of the nature of the site's discovery, excavation and of any subsequent publication. In some cases, the very processes, which led to the site's discovery such as quarrying, construction or agricultural practices, have also inadvertently destroyed valuable archaeological data. Among the sites identified in the survey, there are many examples of human remains and, in some instances, accompanying grave goods, being recovered from

Figure 3.9. Size of sites associated with barrows identified in this survey measured by number of inhumation and/or cremation burials[i]

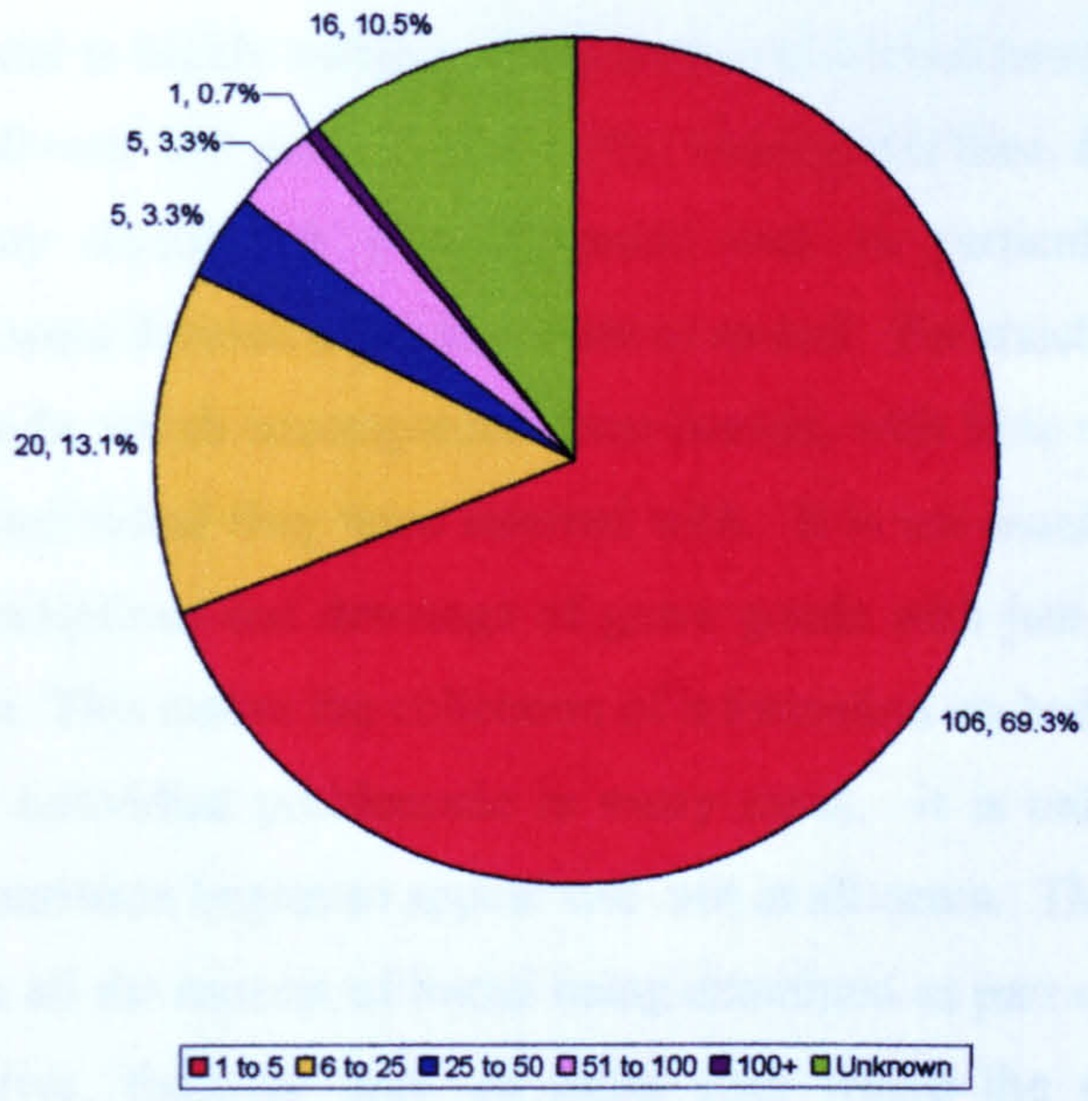
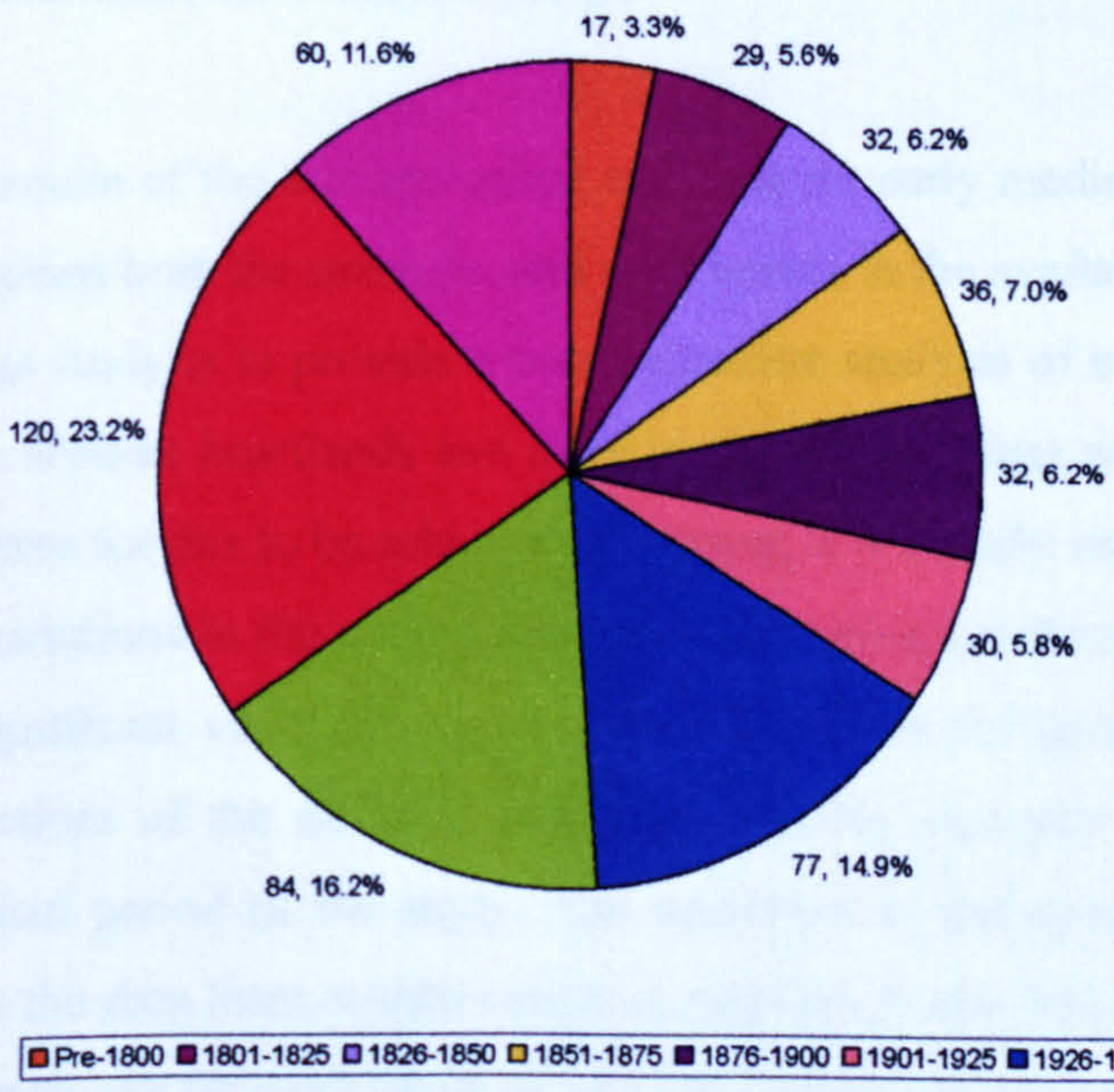


Figure 3.10. Date of discovery/excavation of burial sites identified in this survey[i]



[i] Charts give number of sites, followed by percentage

spoil heaps.[5] In these cases, all information on body position, orientation and data on many aspects of the grave itself may not be available. Even among those sites that have been the subject of systematic antiquarian or archaeological excavation, the amount of data available on all aspects of burial is highly variable. Early medieval burials have been uncovered in the Wessex area for well over 200 years (figure 3.10). During this time, there have been marked changes in the way discoveries were recorded and, in particular, which aspects of archaeological data were deemed to be important to record. For much of this time, the focus lay on the grave goods, which accompanied some burials, with little or no attention given to the remains of the individual they were interred with. It is not unusual for early reports to contain detailed descriptions and drawings of grave goods with just a brief mention that a skeleton was present. This makes the collection of information on body position, orientation, age and sex of the individual problematic in many cases. It is only in twentieth-century reports that this information begins to appear and not in all cases. This means that for many sites information on all the aspects of burial being examined as part of this analysis will not be present. However, focusing only on those sites where the quality of the data is exceptionally good would not only reduce the sample size, but would also increase the bias in an already skewed dataset. Instead, this analysis will as far as possible try to incorporate all available data.

3.2.4. Implications for research design

This assessment of the archaeological evidence for early medieval burial in the Wessex area has highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses in the available data. One of the principal aims of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of early medieval burial practices within the Wessex heartlands and there is clearly sufficient archaeological evidence within the study area for this to be achieved. However, it is equally important to recognise that, as a result of variations in the geographical and chronological distribution of the evidence, there will be significant variations in the extent to which the dataset is truly representative of burial practices of the different parts of the study area and across different parts of the chronological period of the study. The variations in the geographical distribution of sites means that the data from counties such as Hampshire and Wiltshire, which have in excess of 100 sites each, are far more likely to be representative of the range of burial practices used in these counties during the early medieval period than the data from Devon, where there are eight sites.

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[5] For example, five burials from the seventh- to eighth-century cemetery of Portsdown II were recovered from spoil heaps (Corney 1967:21).

A similar situation exists with the chronological distribution of sites. For while there are sufficient numbers of burials across the entire study period to permit a detailed examination of mortuary practices, it is clear that the first two centuries of the study period are better represented within the dataset. The large number of seventh- and eighth-century sites will permit a comprehensive analysis of data, which are reasonably representative of the range of mortuary practices during this period, at least for the eastern part of the study area which has the greatest density of sites. There is significantly less burial evidence for the later Saxon period, although the evidence that does exist, unlike that from the middle Saxon period, is reasonably well distributed across the study area. The majority of the available data comes from urban centres and there is very little evidence from rural burials. Moreover, the vast majority of the urban burials are associated with important cathedral, abbey or minister churches, with few burials associated with smaller churches. Other studies have suggested that higher levels of variation in funerary provision may be associated with high-status churches, such as York Minister (Buckberry 2004 and in press), and the predominance of burials associated with high-status churches within this dataset may result in a degree of bias. Yet, for all its biases, a systematic and comprehensive analysis of this dataset will significantly add to the understanding of the mortuary practices of a much neglected period and provide an initial framework for future work. Although, an accurate picture of later Saxon burial practices will only be obtained when a larger data set becomes available, and this can only be achieved with additional excavated material and an extensive radiocarbon dating programme of extant skeletal material (O'Brien & Roberts 1996:162).

3.3. Definition of the burial dataset

While this study has identified a corpus of 517 sites of definite or possible early medieval date, not all were suitable for use in the detailed analysis of burial practices and accordingly a burial sub-set of the corpus was created. Only burials from those sites that could be securely dated to the study period were used in the detailed analysis of funerary practices. Thus, all burials from sites, whose entire period of use lay between c.600-1100AD could potentially be included. However, those sites, where burial either started prior to c.600AD or continued beyond c.1100AD, proved more of a problem, one which was resolved using a number of different methods.

For those sites in use prior to 600AD, the approach varied depending on the geographical location of the site. For sites in the eastern part of the study area, only cemeteries such as Bargates (Do) (Jarvis 1983) and Portway West (Stoodley in press) which came into use in

the late sixth century were included. Cemeteries founded during the fifth or early sixth century, such as Alton (Ha) (Evison 1988) and Collingbourne Ducis (Wi) (Gingell 1978), were excluded from the analysis even though many did continue in use into the early or mid-seventh century. There is less evidence for the foundation of new cemeteries during the seventh century in the western part of the study area[6] and many of the known seventh century graves lay in burials grounds with earlier origins. This meant that a different approach was required with sites in use prior to 600AD in this part of the study area. If a cemetery was founded in the sixth century and persisted into the seventh or eighth centuries, such as Lamyatt Beacon (So) (Leech 1986), all burials were included. If a cemetery with origins prior to 500AD continued into the seventh or eight century, such as Cannington (So) (Rathz, Hirst & Wright 2000), only post-Roman burials were included.

For those cemeteries that continued in use beyond the end of the eleventh century, all phases pre-dating c.1100AD were used in this analysis as were those that may just have extended into the twelfth century. However, any phases extending beyond the mid-twelfth century or later were excluded from the analysis. If there was no phasing and the site extended well into the medieval or post-medieval periods, burials from that site were not used. The one exception to the rule was if charcoal burials were present. This phenomenon rarely occurs later than the twelfth century and was one of the criteria used in identifying possible Saxon inhumations at Exeter Cathedral (Dv) (Hendersen & Bidwell 1982:156).

A second key factor in defining the sub-set of the corpus was the quality of the available data on individual burials.[7] It was not necessary to have information for each burial on all variables being examined for it to be included in the burial sub-set. However, in some cases the information from some sites was either non-existent or so fragmentary or contradictory as to render it useless. As such, only sites which were securely dated and had at least some information on the funerary provision accorded to specific individuals were selected for use in the burial sub-set. Such a selection policy was designed to utilise as much of the available information as possible without imparting any additional bias to the sample. Finally, it should be noted that, even for those sites used in the burial sub-set, in a number of cases not all burials could be used due to variations in the amount of detail available on each burial.[8] Table 3.3. provides a list of sites included in the burial dataset as well as the number of burials used from each site.

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[6] With the exception of eastern Dorset, which contains a number of seventh-century foundations, including Ulwell (Cox 1989), Hambledon Hill (Mercer & Healy forthcoming), and Bradford Peverell (Hawthorne *pers. comm.*).

[7] As has been discussed above (section 3.2.3), this varies considerably between sites.

[8] Details of which burials from each site were included and excluded from detailed analysis are given in the Gazetteer.

Table 3.3. Composition of dataset for detailed analysis.

Site Name	Number of burials included	Site name	Number of burials included
Abbeymeads, Swindon (Wi)	1	Poundbury (Do)	2
Alvediston, Barrow 1C (Wi)	1	Preshaw (Ha)	1
Bargates (Do)	30	Reading II (Bk)	1
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	105	Roche Court Down I (Wi)	16
Buckland Dinham (So)	1	Rodmead Down Barrow (Wi)	1
Bradford Peverell (Do)	18	Romsey Abbey (Ha)	31
Bath Abbey (So)	31	Roundway Down, Barrow 3 (Wi)	1
Beckery Chapel (So)	58	Roundway Down barrow 1 (Wi)	1
Bevis' Grave (Ha)	88	Shepton Mallet (So)	2
Brean Down (So)	8	Shewton (Wi)	1
Burghfield (Bk)	50	Six Dials, Hamwic (Ha)	14
Camerton (So)	116	Snell's Corner (Ha)	33
Cathedral Close, Winchester (Ha)	1	SOU 124, Southampton (Ha)	1
Cook Street (Ha)	21	SOU 32, Southampton (Ha)	11
Coombe Bissett (Wi)	1	SOU 34, Southampton (Ha)	3
Cross Barrows, East Ilsey III (Bk)	1	SOU 414, Southampton (Ha)	6
Didcot Power Station (Ox)	17	SOU 13, Southampton (Ha)	81
Eggardon Hill-fort (Do)	3	SOU 862, Southampton (Ha)	16
Exeter Cathedral II (Dv)	114	South Gate, Winchester (Ha)	2
Ford, Barrow 18 (Wi)	1	St. Mary's Stadium I (Ha)	26
Frilford II (Ox)	1	St. Mary's Stadium II (Ha)	8
Hambledon Hill (Do)	13	Staple Gardens (Ha)	288
Henley Wood (So)	5	Stockbridge Down (Ha)	41
Hicknall Slait (So)	4	Stoneage Barton, Cothelstone (So)	5
Illsley Down Barrows	2	Stonehenge (Wi)	1
Lamyatt Beacon (So)	12	Swallowcliffe Down (Wi)	1
Long Crichel Barrow 7 (Do)	3	Temple of Sulis Minerva (So)	15
Long Wittenham (Ox)	10	Templecombe (So)	11
Longcot (Ox)	1	The Brooks, Winchester (Ha)	2
Lowbury Hill (Ox)	1	Tinney's Lane, Sherborne (Do)	1
Lower Brook Street, Winchester (Ha)	4	Tolpuddle Ball (Do)	4
Maiden Castle (Do)	2	Trowbridge (Wi)	148
Meon Hill (Ha)	10	Trumpet Major (Do)	8
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	15	Ulwell (Do)	55
Nunnaminster (Ha)	6	Wells Cathedral (So)	242
Ogbourne St, Andrews (Wi)	1	Wembdon (So)	12
Old Dairy Cottage (Ha)	17	West Ham (Ha	1
Oliver's Battery (Ha)	1	West Knoyle I (Wi)	1
Pentridge, Woodyates Inn 1 (Do)	1	Westgate, Southampton (Ha)	3
Perham Down (Wi)	1	Winkelbury Hill I (Wi)	1
Porchester Castle (Ha)	22	Winkelbury Hill II (Wi)	30
Portesham (Do)	9	Winkelbury Hill III (Wi)	1
Portsdown II (Ha)	21	Winnall II (Ha)	47
Portsdown III (Ha)	1	Wraysbury (Bk)	3
Portway West (Ha)	12	Yatesbury, Cherhill barrow (Wi)	2

3.4. Methodology

3.4.1. Data on burial sites

Four categories of data were collected for all sites identified in the survey (table 3.4). The data was obtained from published reports and from unpublished documents held at local SMRs, museums and county record offices. The sources consulted for each specific site are listed in the gazetteer. For those sites with burials associated with monuments, such as barrows, additional information on the age and type of monument and the spatial relationship between the monument and associated burial/burials was also recorded.

3.4.2. Data on funerary provision

Information on all aspects of the funerary provision accorded an individual (table 3.5) was collected for all individuals in the individual burial dataset. Table 3.3 lists the burials included in this dataset. The data was obtained from published reports and from unpublished documents held at local SMRs or by museums. The sources consulted for each specific site are listed in the gazetteer.

3.4.3. Skeletal Data

The size of the study sample combined with the constraints of time precludes the re-analysis of all extant skeletal material and therefore details of age and sex for virtually all burials are drawn from the published excavation reports or excavation archives. For all other sites where demographic information was lacking, the age and sex of the individuals were recorded as unknown.

3.4.4. Data storage and analysis

All information was stored on an Access database. Methods used in analysis included use of Excel spreadsheets and graphical representations.

3.4.5. Radiocarbon dating programme

A programme of radiocarbon dating[9] was undertaken as part of the detailed analysis of early medieval burial in the cities of Southampton and Winchester (discussed in chapter 8). A

[9] The radiocarbon dating was funded by an ORADS grant from NERC and research funds provided as part of a University of Sheffield Studentship.

total of twenty burials from eleven different sites were radiocarbon dated. Nine sites were in the Southampton area and one was near Winchester. The final site, Bevis' Grave (Ha), is the only large non-urban cemetery thought to extend beyond the early eighth century in the Wessex area and as such provides the only potential rural comparative data for the later Southampton and Winchester cemeteries. Twelve burials were analysed to refine the dating of five cemeteries, while the remaining eight burials were all undated but came from six sites suspected to be of early medieval date (see tables 3.6. & 3.7 for a summary of these sites and the reasons for their inclusion in the dating programme).[10] All bar one of the skeletons was found to date the early medieval period and the results are summarised in tables 3.8 and 3.9.

[10] See appendix 1 for more details on the sites used in the radiocarbon dating programme and the reasons for their inclusion.

Table 3.4. Categories of data collected on each burial site within the dataset

General category	Information collected
General description	Type - cremation/inhumation/mixed Isolated burial or cemetery Number of burials Date excavated or discovered Date of site SMR number NMR number
Geographical	OS grid references[1]
Presence of other archaeological features	Associated ecclesiastical buildings Re-use of or association with Prehistoric or Roman or Anglo-Saxon monuments

Table 3.5. Categories of burial data considered in this study

Area of funerary provision	General category	Data collected
Treatment of the body	Pre-burial treatment	Cremation or inhumation
	Treatment during burial	Body position Arm position Body orientation Multiple burials
	Post-burial treatment	Disturbance of burial
Funerary provision	Grave Type	Presence of grave linings, e.g. stone, charcoal sand etc. Structural features, e.g. ledges & head recesses
	Grave furnishings	Grave goods Evidence for use of coffins and wooden structures Use of pillow and foot stones
	Above ground structures	Commemorative sculpture Barrows & re-use of existing monuments Ditches and mounds Post holes

[1] In accordance with requests from a number of SMRs within the study area, no OS grid references for any site are given in this work.

Table 3.6. Samples selected to refine the dating of known early medieval burials

Site	Site details	Reasons for selection of site	Answers provided by radiocarbon dates
SOU 13	This is the largest excavated cemetery in Hamwic with W-E intercutting burials in rows and exhibits many of the characteristics of later medieval cemeteries.	To refine the dating of the cemetery. To provide some idea of the period of time that the cemetery was in use.	The dating of the skeletons suggests that the cemetery was in use between the later seventh and early ninth centuries, probably with the majority of individuals interred during the eighth century.
SOU 32	Small middle Saxon cemetery in Hamwic thought to contain a penannular ditch, possibly contemporary with the Cook Street cemetery.	To refine the dating of the cemetery Was the cemetery in use at the same time as the Cook Street cemetery?	The radiocarbon analysis points to a late seventh or early eighth century for the cemetery and suggest that it was in use at the same time as the Cook Street Cemetery.
Six Dials	Small cemetery of W-E burials considered on stratigraphic grounds to be one of the later cemeteries in Hamwic, possible in use during the ninth century.	To refine the dating of the cemetery Is this one of the later of the Hamwic cemeteries?	The radiocarbon date was much earlier than had been expected and contradicted all the stratigraphical evidence. An addition radiocarbon date is planned to resolve the discrepancy.
Hawkeswood Road (SOU 414), Southampton	A small group of unfurnished W-E burials were found in the vicinity of the Roman fort of Clausentum. Radiocarbon dating of one of the burials produced a middle Saxon date, but a disturbed skull associated with an early Anglo-Saxon spearhead of the fifth or sixth century was also recovered.[i]	A second date should assist in resolving the date of this cemetery.	A second date from the seventh/eighth century has confirmed that this small cemetery is from the middle Saxon period.
Bevis' Grave, Bedhampton	71 graves associated with the south ditch of the Neolithic long barrow of Bevis' Grave. All, bar the two most westerly burials, are W-E aligned. The majority of the grave goods found with some of the burials suggest a seventh-century date for the cemetery. However, one of the burials is accompanied with a strap end dated to the ninth century. As such, this is only rural cemetery of any size identified in the study area, which seems continue beyond the early 8th century and has the potential to provide a valuable comparison for the Hamwic burials.	When was the cemetery in use? What is the relationship between the two N-S burials and the other E-W burials? What is the date of the triple burial? Are the burials distributed chronological from west to east along the southern barrow ditch?	The radiocarbon dating indicates that this cemetery was in use by the early seventh century and continued in use until the tenth century with the majority of burials of dated either by grave goods or radiocarbon dating being interred during the seventh and eighth centuries.

[i] When the radiocarbon dating was conducted the spearhead was thought to be early Saxon, but it has since been re-examined and a seventh century date is now suggested for the spearhead (Stoodley *pers. comm.).*

Table 3.7. Burials of unknown, but suspected early medieval, date included in the radiocarbon programme

Site	Site details	Reasons for selection of site	Answers provided by radiocarbon dates
The Deanery (SOU 184)	An isolated female burial found under Chapel Road just to the south of two Saxon burials from SOU 630 believed to part of cemetery of St. Mary's Church (Mother Church of Southampton).	Is this a pre-conquest burial? This may extend the furthest southern limits of the graveyard associated with St. Mary's Church	The burial dates from the eleventh/twelfth century and was almost certainly part of the churchyard of St. Mary's Church and as such extends the southern limits of the cemetery.
Upper Bugle Street (SOU 124)	An isolated body deposited in late Saxon ditch in the late Saxon/Medieval town of Southampton. Pottery from the fill of ditch suggests a late Saxon date for this burial.	Is this a late Saxon burial? Would demonstrate that not all individuals were accorded a churchyard burial in the late Saxon period.	This skeleton dates from the eighth-tenth century, a little earlier than expected and has potentially interesting implications for the dating of the "late" Saxon ditch " in which the burial was interred.
Westgate (SOU 25)	Three W-E aligned burials from the site of the later Saxon/Medieval town of Southampton which thought to represent the south edge of a cemetery. Pottery in associated features is suggestive of a late Saxon date.	Are these burials late Saxon? If they are indeed Saxon, they would represent the only articulated Saxon burials from the later town and raise questions about the dominance of the mother church of St. Mary's as the only site of burial in the late Saxon period.	Both skeletons date from the late Saxon period (c.10 century) and provide the first examples of articulated early medieval burials from the late Saxon town demonstrating that St. Mary's Church was not the only location for burial during this period.
SOU 207	Several E-W aligned burials associated with the ramparts of the Roman fort of Clausentum. This site lies between SOU 414 and site 108/862, both which have produced burials of Saxon data.	Are these early medieval burials? SOU 207 is the closest site with securely provenanced extant skeletal remains to the cluster of sites lying between Hawkeswood Road and the inner Rampart of the Roman fort. A secure date for SOU 207 would provide some indication of the date of the 100+ burials these sites have yielded.	The skeletal material dated to the late seventh or eighth century and increases the evidence suggesting many of the remains recovered from the cluster of sites lying between Hawkeswood Road and the inner rampart of the Roman fort are likely to be of similar date.
SOU 206	Isolated burial cut into rampart of Roman fort of Clausentum	Is this an early medieval burial?	The burial dated to the third or fourth century and provides the first securely dated Roman burial in the Southampton area.
Old Dairy Cottage, near Winchester	Group of 15 graves containing the remains of at least 17 individuals, 9 exhibiting clear evidence for decapitation. Two associated buckles are suggestive of a 7th century date, but a third buckle is more suggestive of a late Roman date.	Are these burials late Roman or Anglo-Saxon?	The skeletons date to the eighth-tenth centuries proving that this is an early medieval execution site.

Table 3.8. Radiocarbon results from undated, but suspected early medieval, sites

Site	Grave number	Oxford laboratory Number	Uncalibrated date	Calibrated age ranges	
				68.2% probability	95.4% probability
Westgate (SOU 25)	Skeleton 3558	OxA -12115	1075±24 BP	900-1000AD	895-1020AD
	Skeleton 3425	OxA - 12195	1066±32 BP	900-1020AD	895-1025AD
Upper Bugle Street III	SOU 124	OxA – 12076	1169±22 BP	780-940AD	775-960AD
SOU 184	SOU 184	OxA - 12075	965±22 BP	1020-1155AD	1015-1160AD
SOU 206	SOU 206	OxA - 12074	1727±25 BP	255-385AD	240-390AD
SOU 207	SOU 207	OxA - 12077	1267±22 BP	690-780AD	675-805AD
Old Dairy Cottage	Grave 123 (skeleton 560)	OxA - 12045	1163±25 BP	780-955AD	775-965AD
	Grave 128 (skeleton 575)	OxA - 12046	1088±26 BP	895-995AD	890-1020

Table 3.9. Radiocarbon dates used to refine cemetery dates.

Site	Grave number	Oxford laboratory Number	Uncalibrated date	Calibrated age ranges	
				68.2% probability	95.4% probability
SOU 13	Grave 31	OxA - 12041	1260±26 BP	690-780AD	675-865AD
	Grave 40	OxA – 12042	1475±26 BP	560-640AD	540-645AD
	Grave 59	OxA – 12043	12043±26 BP	690-860AD	685-885AD
	Grave 64	OxA - 12044	1290±25 BP	685-770AD	665-780AD
SOU 32	Grave 428	Wk-14450	1326±39 BP	650-770AD	640-780AD
Six Dials (SOU 31)	Grave 6004	Wk-14449	1410±49 BP	600-665AD	550-690AD
Hawkeswood Road (SOU 414)	Context 546	OxA - 12078	1336±22 BP	660-690AD	650-770AD
Bevis Grave	Grave 1 (skeleton 90)	OxA – 12181	1421±25 BP	615-660AD	595-665AD
	Grave 3 (skeleton 1)	OxA - 12182	1237±32 BP	690-865AD	685-890AD
	Grave 44 (skeleton 41)	OxA - 12183	1279±29 BP	685-775AD	660-805AD
	Grave 59 (skeleton 57)	OxA - 12193	1075±33 BP	900-1020AD	890-1020AD
	Grave 68 (skeleton 76)	OxA - 12194	1287±33 BP	685-775AD	660-805AD

Chapter 4

These Earthly Remains

Funerary rituals have been perceived by archaeologists as performing a number of functions on a multiplicity of levels, from the transformation of the dead into ancestors to the renegotiation of social and political relationships (Parker Pearson 1999:158-161; Halsall 1995a:247-8; Samson 1987:126). Yet, regardless of the function of the rite, at the centre of the funerary process lies the body of the deceased, for it is the loss of life which sets all funerary rituals in process and it is the disposal - for want of a better word - of the earthly remains of the dead by the living that forms an integral part of virtually all mortuary practices. As such, the body provides arguably the most pertinent subject with which to begin a survey of early medieval burial practices in the Wessex heartlands. This chapter explores the treatment of the body prior to burial, the deposition of the remains of the deceased and the post-burial treatment of the body. The examination of the treatment of the remains of the deceased within a mortuary context is important to any understanding of the funerary practices of this period and also provides an insight into how both the post-mortem body and the concept of resurrection were perceived in a period which saw the introduction of a new faith.

4.1. The pre-burial treatment of the body

The preparation of the body for burial was an important and integral part of funerary practices, set in motion by an individual's passing. Much of the available information for the treatment of the body prior to burial for the early medieval period is derived from documentary sources. While this information is invaluable, it is important to realise that the written sources reflect the ideas, aspirations and mores of only a very small part of early

medieval society, the ecclesiastics and those of high status. In contrast, the archaeological evidence for the preparation of the body, while very fragmentary, has the potential to provide information on a wider cross-section of society:

> 'When the brother has departed this life, his body shall be washed by those appointed to do so: when washed it is clothed in clean garments namely in shirt cowl, stockings and shoes, no matter what his rank. But if he is a priest a stole may be placed over his cowl, if such be the rule'
>
> *Regularis Concordia* 66 – Symons 1953:65

The washing of the body of the deceased is a theme repeated in many early medieval sources, such as the tenth-century *Regularis Concordia* quoted above,[1] and particularly in saint's lives where the water used to wash the deceased is often used later to perform miracles, such as curing a demoniac boy in *Bede's Life of Cuthbert* (Webba 1965:97). Closely linked to the washing of the body is clothing it in what was deemed to be appropriate garb. Written sources from the seventh and eighth centuries, such as the account of the burial of St Cuthbert in priestly vestments and shoes[2] from the *Anonymous Life of St Cuthbert* (Colgrave 1940:131) suggests that clothed burial was not prohibited by the early Anglo-Saxon Church. Burial in clothes is also suggested by buckles, pins and belt fittings recovered from many middle Saxon graves.[3] Although fragmentary the available evidence suggests that clothing seems to have been considered appropriate attire for the burial during the middle Saxon period.

The latter part of the early medieval period saw the introduction of the use of shrouds, such as that depicted in the scenes of Edward the Confessor's funeral on the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry (figure 4.1) (Barlow 1997:253). Although references to shrouds appear in a number of late Saxon documentary sources,[4] archaeological evidence for the use of shrouds is poor. The possible shroud pin found in grave 8 at Wembdon (So) (Woods undated) is the only *in situ* example within the study dataset.[5]

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[1] The tenth-century Regularis Concordia was issued in Winchester as part of the tenth-century monastic reform in England and was designed to established uniform observance for monks and nuns across the country. Other documentary examples detailing the post-burial treatment of the deceased include in the eighth-century Eddius Stephanus' Life of Wilfred (Webb 1965a:181) and the eleventh-century Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc (Brooke 2002:183-5).

[2] According to Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*, the shoes Cuthbert worn in the grave were later used to heal a paralytic (Webb 1965b:101)

[3] Grave goods are discussed in more detail in section 5.2.1.

[4] *"The dead body is wound with a shroud, but that body does not rise readily with the man because a shameful shroud does not befit him but rather the spiritual garments that God provides for him"* from Aelfric's Homilies quoted in Thompson 2004:237.

[5] The burial from Wembdon has been radiocarbon dated to 650-960AD at a 2σ level of confidence.

Figure 4.1. The shrouded body of Edward the Confessor is carried to Westminster Abbey for burial from the late eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry
(Barlow 1997-plate 12a)

Table 4.1. Gold thread and gold braid recovered from graves at the Old Minster and New Minster, Winchester[1]

Site	Grave Number	Date of grave	Description and location
Old Minster	796	Early ninth century	Writing lead
	673	Early to mid-ninth century	Gold braid found at base of skull
	82	Early to mid-ninth century	Single thread lying on upper body
	67	Mid-to late ninth century	Gold braids from around the skull
	717	Late ninth century	Gold braid from around skull
New Minster	664	Early tenth century	Fragments of gold thread lying between hands on pelvis

[1] Based on data in Crowfoot 1990

There is no surviving fabric evidence for shrouds within the study dataset. Possible examples of shroud fabric have, however, been found outside the study area, such as the fragment of fabric adhering to a skull from the late Saxon churchyard of St. Nicholas Shambles (GL), which is thought to be part of a linen shroud (Schofield 1988:18). It has been suggested that shrouded burial may have been seen as an expression of Christianity (Blair 2005:240). Yet, while it is impossible to determine how rapidly shrouded burial was adopted, it seems unlikely that the use of shrouds was universal in late Saxon Wessex. According to instructions for preparing the body of members of religious communities for burial in the tenth-century *Regularis Concordia*, quoted above, the body is re-dressed in clothes and not wrapped in a shroud. These instructions were echoed a century later in Lanfranc's Monastic Constitutions (Brooke 2002:183 & 185)[6]. However, on this occasion, the cowl is sewn around the corpse in a way analogous to sewing a corpse into a shroud, with the cowl, like a shroud, serving to prevent the disarray of the corpse during funerary services and burial (*ibid.*:184, n.395). In addition while fragmentary, there is also some archaeological evidence for continued burial in clothes. The fragments of gold braid and gold thread found in late Saxon graves from the Old and New Minster at Winchester (table 4.1) are thought to represent decoration on the clothing in which the corpse was interred (Crowfoot 1990:469). In addition, occasional finds of buckles, hooked taps and strap ends in late Saxon graves may also indicate that some individuals were interred clothed.[7]

4.2. Evidence for post sixth-century cremations rites in the Wessex heartlands

Cremation involves the transformation of the body of the deceased into a small quantity of fragmented and burnt bone. It was an expensive process in terms of both the materials required and the time involved and, as such, it should be seen in many ways as a more elaborate and spectacular rite than inhumation. While both cremation and inhumation rites were practices during the early medieval period, cremation has traditionally been seen as an early Saxon funerary practice. However, there is an increasing body of evidence for the persistence of cremation into the seventh, and even eighth, century. The recent discovery of

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[6] "When washed *it* (the body) *shall be clad in a new shift, or one newly washed and a cowl: a head cloth of linsey-wolsey in the shape of a hood shall be on its head; the hood belonging to the cowl shall be brought over this and attached in three places with thread. Gaiters of the same material reaching to the knees shall be put on the legs, and night shoes on the feet. The hands shall be covered by the sleeves of the cowl. The cowl shall be sewn together from arm to arm, and round the legs likewise. The night shoes also shall be joined together with thread*"(Brooke 2002:183 & 185).

[7] See tables 5.21 and 5.22 in chapter 5 for a list of items found in post eighth-century graves within the study area.

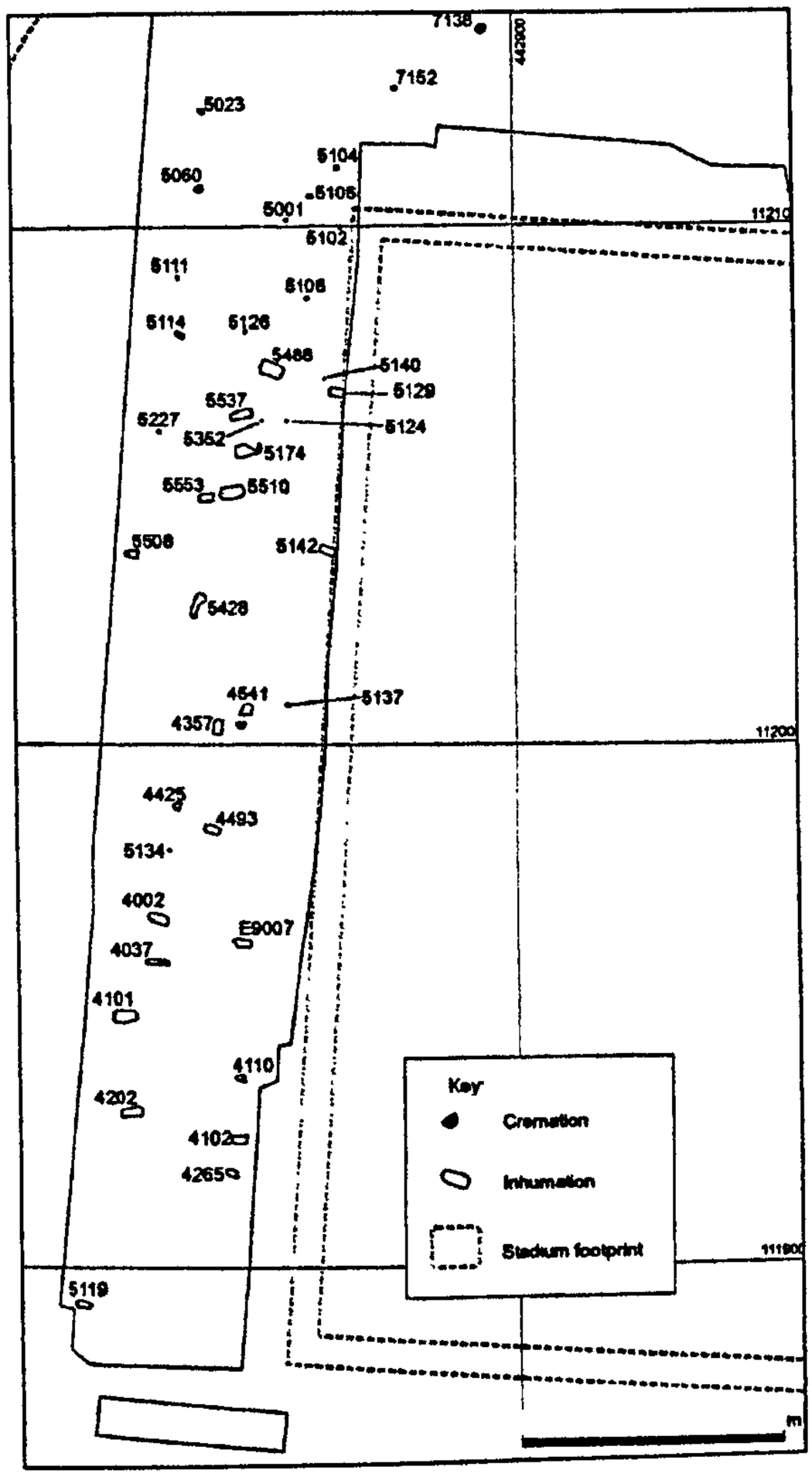

Figure 4.2. Plan of the late seventh- to early eighth-century St. Mary's Stadium mixed rite cemetery, Hampshire showing the spatial distribution of cremation and inhumation burials. (from Birbeck & Smith 2003, courtesy of the Wessex Trust for Archaeology)

Table 4.2. General body position categories used in this study

Category name	Torso position	Leg position
Supine	Supine	Unknown
Supine extended		Extended
Supine, one leg flexed		One leg extended, the other flexed
Supine flexed		Both legs flexed
Flexed	On side	Legs flexed 90° or less
Crouched	On side	Legs flexed more than 90°
Prone	Prone	Any

a mixed-rite cemetery dating to the late seventh and early eighth century at St. Mary's Stadium (figure 4.2.) (Birbeck 2005), provides evidence of the persistence of the cremation rite to the seventh century within the study area. St. Mary's may not be the only example of post-sixth century cremations within the study area. The identification of a seventh-century cremation from the mixed-rite cemetery at Apple Down (WSx)[8] raises the possibility that the mixed-rite cemeteries within the study area may contain cremations of seventh-century date (Down & Welch 1990:108). Within the study area, the presence of cremations in the late sixth- to early seventh-century cemetery at Bargates (Do) is indicative of the persistence of the rite into the late sixth, and possibly seventh, centuries (Jarvis 1983). In addition, it has been suggested that a cremation from the late fifth- to seventh-century cemetery at Weston Colley, Micheldever may date to the seventh century (N. Stoodley *pers.comm.)*. While fragmentary, this evidence suggests that cremation may have persisted as an alternative to inhumation in mixed rite cemeteries until they went out of use during the course of the seventh century.

The increasing evidence for seventh-century cremations does not change the fact that the data from the study area indicates that the frequency of the cremation rite was in decline in Wessex during the seventh century. All of the mixed cemeteries identified in this study, with the obvious exception of St. Mary's Stadium, appear to have gone out of use by the early to mid-seventh century. Furthermore, even if cremation did persist into the seventh century in the mixed-rite cemeteries founded in the fifth and sixth centuries, the rite is notable by its absence in the many cemeteries founded within the study area during the seventh century.[9] This suggests that during the seventh century cremation ceased to be a viable alternative to inhumation for the vast majority of the population of Wessex.[10] However, due to the difficulties in dating cremations (Williams 2002:61), it is impossible to determine if the rite went into rapid decline during the seventh century or whether the proportion of individuals opting for cremation was already in decline during the sixth century.

Determining the factors which lay behind the decline in cremation is equally problematic. The seventh century was a time of significant social and economic change, which seems to have seen an increasing social stratification of society. It was also a period which saw

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[8] This site is not far from the Hampshire border and lies just outside the study area.

[9] Examples include Ulwell (Do) (Cox 1989), Winnall II (Ha) (Meaney & Hawkes 1970), Snell's Corner (Ha) (Knocker 1955); Ports Down (Ha) (Corney 1967); Burghfield (Bk) (Butterworth & Lobb 1992), Didcot (Ox) (Boyle *et al* 1995) and Monkton Deverill (Wi) (Rawlings 1995).

[10] No examples of ninth- or tenth-century cremations associated with Scandinavian settlement, such as the late ninth century cremations from Heath Wood, Ingleby (Db) (Posnansky 1956; Richards *et al* 1995), are known from the study area.

changes not only in the frequency of cremation, but also in the use of grave goods in inhumation burials with the disuse of many pre-existing cemeteries and the foundation of others (Hadley 2000a:157). Whether all these changes in funerary behaviour are interrelated or the result of a number of different factors is unclear, but it is possible, that in this climate of changing funerary practices, the cremation rite, which was both involved and time-consuming, now seemed inappropriate. Possibly, the factors which had made cremation a viable alternative to inhumation were no longer present or perhaps whatever social function cremation performed was no longer needed. The one exception to the general trend is the mixed-rite St Mary's Stadium cemetery (Ha), which contains seventh-, possibly eighth-, century cremations (Birbeck 2005:13, 26-7). This cemetery is unusual not only for the late cremations, but also for the high proportion of burials with grave goods for a cemetery of that date (Stoodley 2005:78). It has been suggested that this atypical cemetery may have been linked to a putative seventh-century royal estate (Birbeck 2005:193). It is possible that the factors that determined the mortuary practices used by this community differed from those influencing the majority of the population of Wessex.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Church's general indifference to how communities buried their dead during the seventh and eighth centuries may not have extended to cremation, at least on the continent. Charlemagne's legislation in *De partibus Saxoniae*, promulgated in 782AD, explicitly forbade the recently conquered Saxons from cremating their dead (Effros 1997:268). However, caution must be exercised when using Frankish legislation as a means of understanding funerary behaviour in early medieval Wessex. This prohibition dates from the eighth century, a period when cremation does not appear to have been practiced in Wessex. It is certainly possible that Charlemagne's legislation reflects a church policy already in place during the seventh century. However, it has been convincingly argued that the promulgation of *De partibus Saxoniae* was politically not religiously motivated, and was used as a means of suppressing the identity of the recently conquered Saxons (Effros 1997:277). Furthermore even if the suppression of cremation was the policy of the Church in the seventh century, it is very unlikely that the nascent Anglo-Saxon Church in seventh-century Wessex was in a position to eliminate the rite and it is necessary to look elsewhere to explain the decline in cremation at this time.

4.3. The deposition of the body of the deceased

While the traditional focus of many studies of early medieval mortuary practices has been the use of grave goods, a number of recent studies have extended this focus to include an examination of other aspects of funerary rites, including the deposition of the body (Pader 1982; Lucy 1998; Stoodley 1999a & 2002). Variations in the nature of deposition of the deceased, such as body position, and in the number of individuals placed within a grave were an integral part of the burial rite. These aspects of mortuary practice not only contributed to the overall effect of the funerary rites, but provided an alternative means of conveying information about the individual and expressing differences (Lucy 1998:51).

4.3.1. The evidence for body position in early medieval inhumation burials from the Wessex heartlands

Before examining the evidence for body position, it is important to be aware of post-depositional factors, such as decomposition or the collapse of wooden structures (coffins or wooden grave linings) within the grave that may have affected the body's posture (Reynolds 1976:142). While post-depositional movement is likely to have a greater impact on arm position, it also has the potential to modify the position of the legs and torso. To minimise the potential problems caused by post-depositional movement, this analysis limited itself to the use of seven simple, broad categories of body position (defined in table 4.2.) in an attempt to minimise errors resulting from post-depositional movement of the body. The contemporaneous burial of additional bodies within the grave is also likely to influence body position (Stoodley 1999a:55) and, as such, body position within this type of multiple burial is considered separately (appendix A).

Information on body position was available from 1345 single inhumation burials within the dataset. Figure 4.3 illustrates the frequency of the seven body positions found within the dataset. Among those burials in the dataset whose body position was known, 95.1% were laid to rest on their back. 71% of these had both legs extended, 3.3% had both legs flexed, 1.6% had one leg extended and the other straight, with the position of the remaining 21.1% being unknown. Other forms of body position were far less common accounting for less than 5% of the total. Of the 53 individuals not placed on their backs, 23 (1.7 %) were flexed burials, 18 (1.3) were prone and 10 (0.74%) were crouched. The sex and the age of the deceased do not appear to have been major factors in determining body position (figures

Figure 4.3. The frequency of body positions within the study dataset

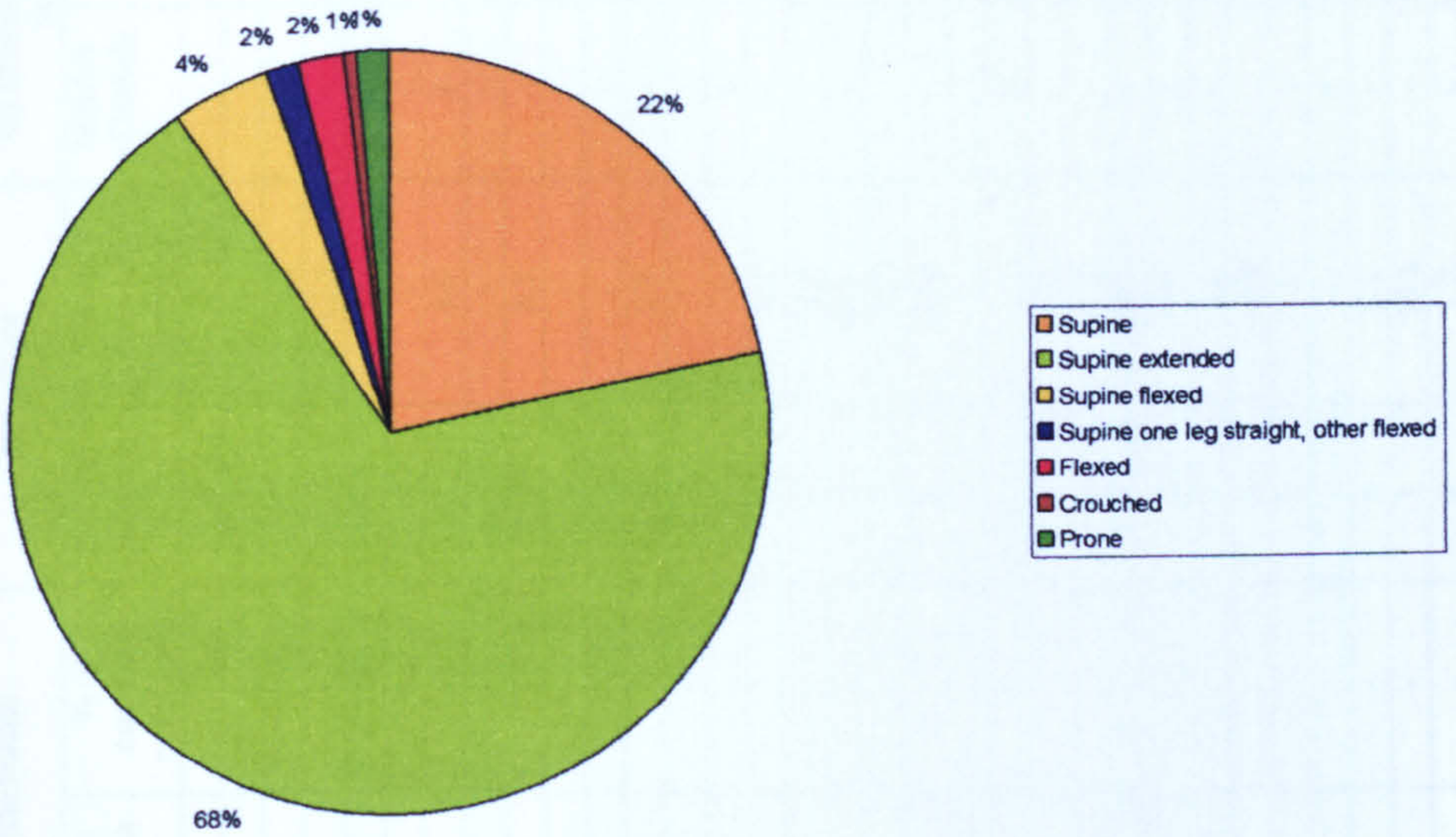

Figure 4.4. Supine extended burials from the ninth- to eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens in Winchester (Ha)viewed from the north

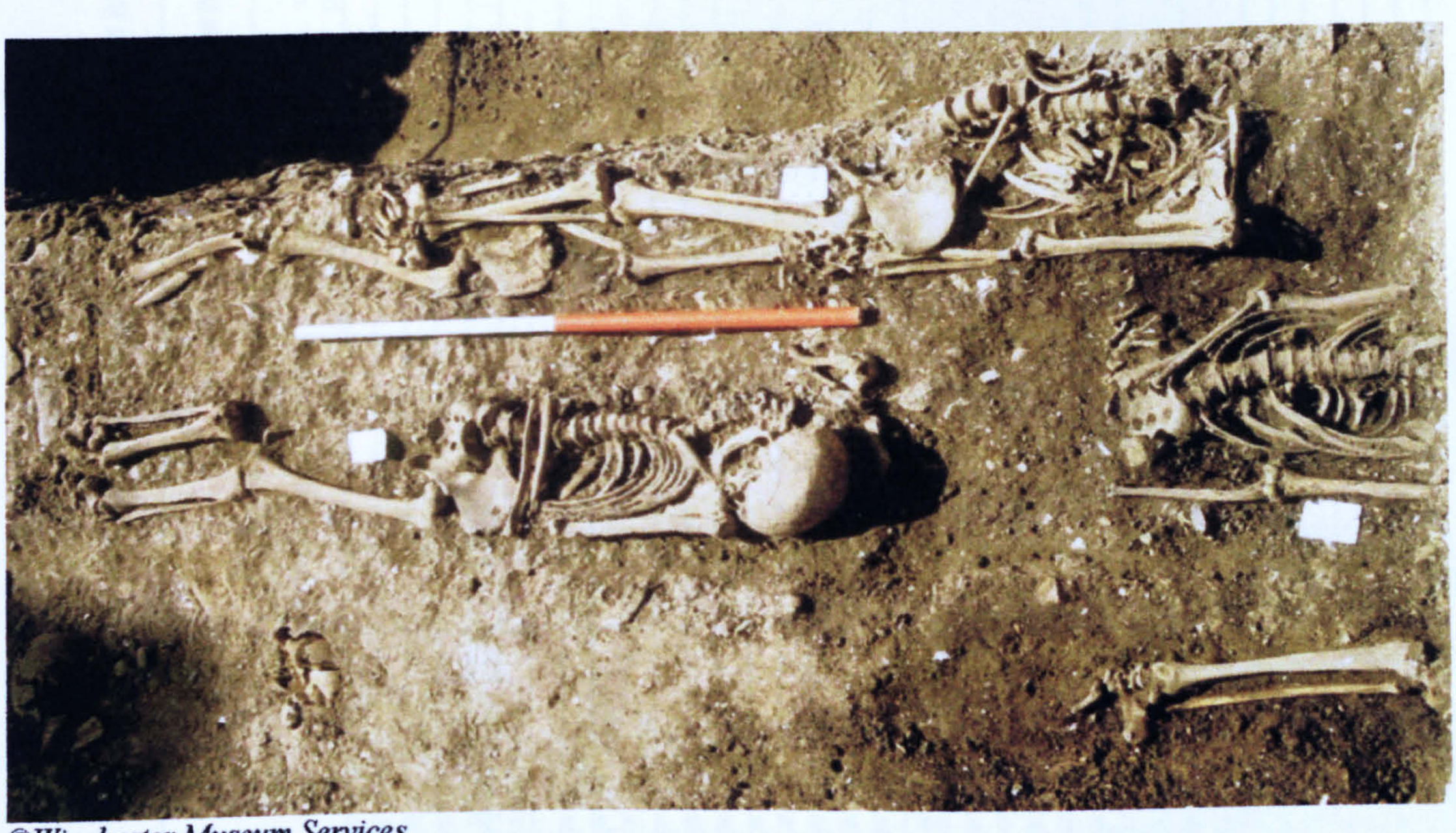

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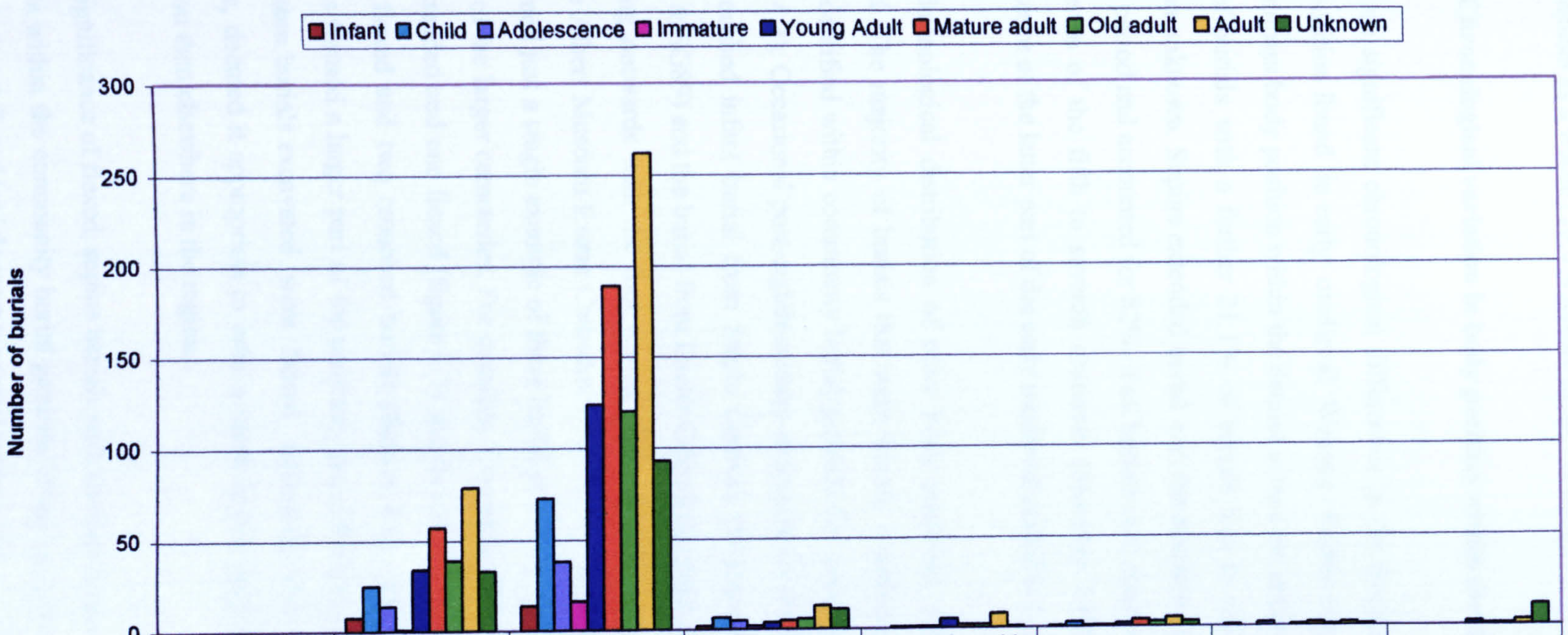
Table 4.3. Incidence of non-supine extended burials by site

Cemetery	Date of site	Total number of individuals	Flexed burials		Crouched Burials		Prone burials		Supine burials with both legs flexed		Supine burials with one leg extended & one leg flexed	
			Number of burials	% of cemetery population	Number of burials	% of cemetery population	Number of burials	% of cemetery population	Number of burials	% of cemetery population	Number of burials	% of cemetery population
Cannington (So)	2nd-7th/8th century	55	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tinney's Lane, Sherbourne (Do)	5th – 7th century	1	-	-	1	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tolpuddle Ball (Do)	5th-7th century	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	25.0	-	-
Brean Down (So)	5th-7th century	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	12.5	-	-
Camerton (So)	Middle Saxon	116	5	4.3	-	-	3	2.6	7	6.0	5	4.3
Beckery Chapel (So)	Middle Saxon	63	-	-	-	-	6	10.3	-	-	-	-
Ulwell (Do)	7th century	55	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.6	2	3.6
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	7th century	15	1	6.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lamyatt Beacon (So)	6th -7th century	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8.3	-	-
Poundbury (Do)	6th-7th century	2	-	-	1	50.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Burghfield (Bk)	7th century	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2.0
Didcot (Ox)	7th century	17	4	23.5	-	-	-	-	1	5.9	-	-
Long Crichel Barrow 7 (Do)	7th century	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	33.3
Maiden Castle (Do)	7th century	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	50.0
Portsdown II (Ha)	7th century	21	-	-	1	4.8	-	-	2	9.5	-	-
Bradford Peverell (Do)	7th century	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	16.6	-	-
Snell's Corner (Ha)	7th century	33	1	3.0	1	3.0	-	-	2	6.1	-	-
Winkelbury Hill II (Wi)	7th century	30	5	16.7	1	3.3	-	-	1	3.3	-	-
Winnall II (Ha)	Late 7th century	47	1	2.1	-	-	-	-	8	17.0	-	-
South Gate, Winchester (Ha)	7th – 8th century	2	-	-	1	50.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portway West (Ha)	7th – 8th century	17	1	9.1	-	-	-	-	1	5.9	2	11.8
Bevis' Grave (Ha)	7th–10th century	88	3	2.6	2	2.3	-	-	1	1.1	-	-
St. Mary's Stadium I (Ha)	7th – 8th century	24	1	4.2	-	-	-	-	1	4.2	-	-
Templecombe (So)	7th –10th century	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	18.2	-	-
Cook Street (Ha)	8th century	21	1	4.8	-	-	-	-	3	14.3	2	9.5
SOU 13, Hamwic (Ha)	8th – 9th century	81	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.2	-	-
St. Mary's Stadium (Ha)	8th – 9th century	8	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	12.3	-	-
Six Dials (Ha)	9th century	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7.1	-	-
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Middle-late Saxon	114	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.9
Stable Gardens (Ha)	9th-11th century	288	-	-	1	0.35	-	-	6	2.1	-	-
Westgate, Southampton (Ha)	10th century	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	33.3	-	-
Trowbridge (Wi)	10th-12th century	164	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1.2	-	-
Stockbridge Down (Ha)	11th century	41	3	2.4	-	-	6	14.6	4	9.8	3	47.3
Meon Hill (Ha)	Late Saxon	10	-	-	-	-	2	20.0	2	20.0	-	-
Old Dairy Cottage (Ha)	9th-11th century	17	1	5.9	-	-	1	5.9	2	11.8	-	-

Figure 4.5. Relationship between body position and biological sex

	Supine	Supine extended	Supine legs flexed	Supine one leg straight, other flexed	Flexed	Crouched	Prone
Male	92	336	14	8	8	2	5
Female	68	273	10	3	4	4	1
Unknown	130	320	31	10	11	4	12

Figure 4.6. The relationship between body position and age



	Supine	Supine extended	Supine legs flexed	Supine one leg straight, other flexed	Flexed	Crouched	Prone
Infant	8	14	2	0	1	1	0
Child	25	73	7	1	3	0	0
Adolescence	14	38	5	1	1	2	0
Immature	1	16	2	1	1	0	0
Young Adult	34	124	4	5	2	1	2
Mature adult	57	189	5	2	4	2	1
Old adult	39	120	6	2	3	1	1
Adult	79	262	13	8	5	2	3
Unknown	33	93	11	1	3	1	11

4.5 & 4.6). There are slightly more male than female burials in all of the categories, except crouched burials, reflecting the imbalance between those of known sex within the study dataset as a whole (20.0% female to 26.7% male).

4.3.2. Chronological variation in body position within the dataset

There are significant chronological differences in the frequency of different categories of body position found in early medieval Wessex. Supine extended burial (figure 4.4) was the dominant body position within the dataset across the entire study period and was found in 74% of burials with a further 21.1% of burials laid to rest on their back with their leg position unknown. Supine extended burial was the dominant burial position during the early Saxon period and accounted for 82% of all burials in a nationwide study of early medieval cemeteries of the fifth to seventh centuries (Stoodley 1999a:55). As such, its continued dominance of the latter part of the early medieval period is not unexpected.

The chronological distribution of other body positions within the study period is more limited. The majority of burials that were flexed, crouched or supine with one leg flexed were identified within community burial grounds that pre-date the end of the eighth century (table 4.3). Occasional post-eighth-century examples are found in the study dataset, such as the crouched infant burial from Staple Gardens (Winchester Museums Service Archives SG84 & SG89) and the burial from Exeter Cathedral, which has one leg flexed with the knee pointing outwards with the foot resting along the shin of the other extended leg (Royal Prince Albert Museum Exeter Cathedral Excavations Archive). The majority of cemeteries contained just a single example of these burial positions, although higher levels were seen in some of the larger cemeteries. For example, Camerton (So) had five supine burials with one leg extended and one flexed (figure 4.7) and five flexed burials, and Bevis Grave (Ha) had three flexed and two crouched burials (figures 4.8). Occasionally, non supine extended burials formed a larger part of the cemetery population as at Didcot (Ox) where four of the seventeen burials excavated were flexed, indicating that this community, for whatever reason, deemed it appropriate to inter a much higher proportion of their population in this position than elsewhere in the region.

The significance of flexed, supine burials with one leg flexed and one extended and crouched burials within the community burial grounds of the seventh and eighth centuries is unclear. Crouched and flexed burials were a normal variant in body position during the early Saxon

Figure 4.7. A supine burial with one leg flexed and the other extended from the seventh-century cemetery at Camerton(So)
©Somerset County Museum

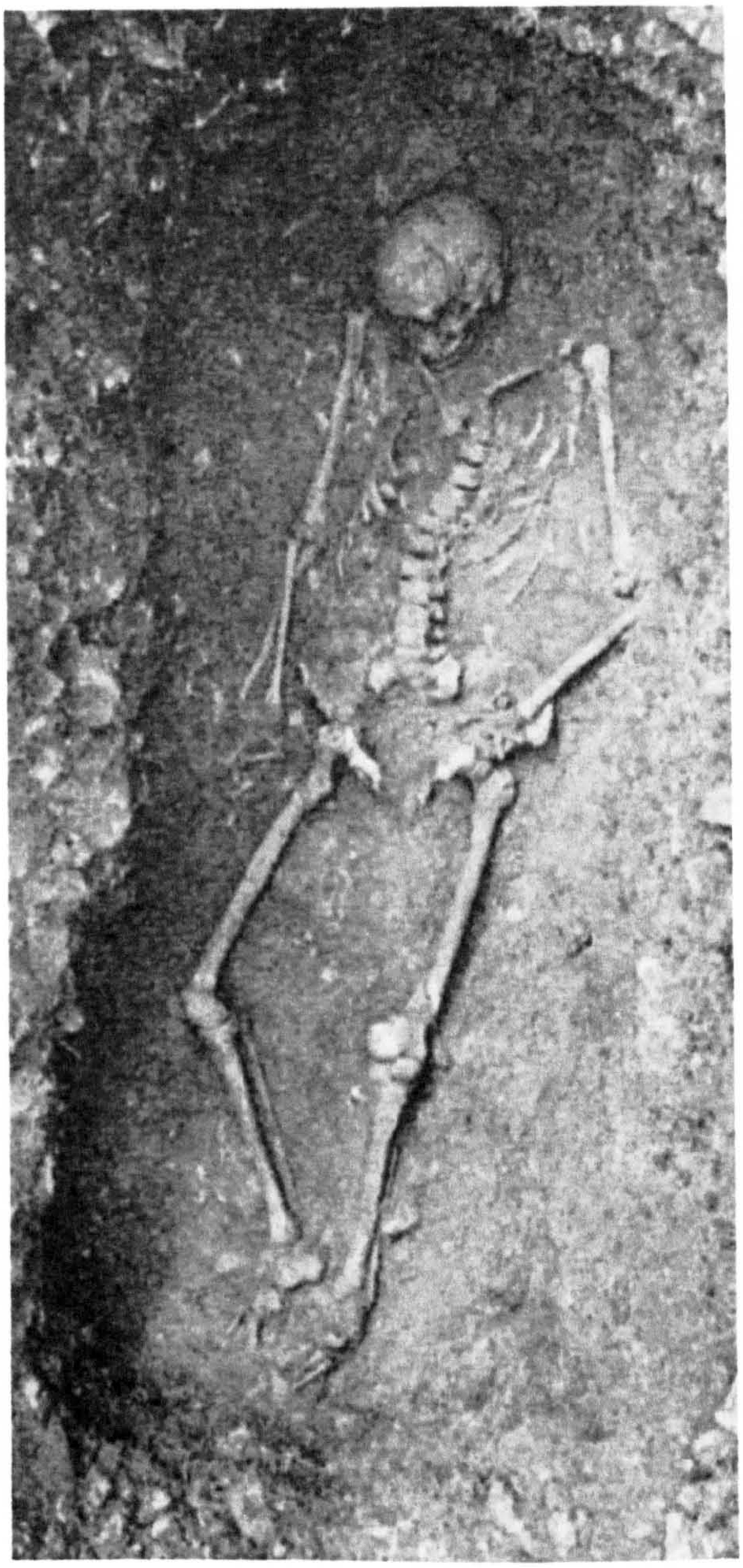


Figure 4.8. A flexed (A) and crouched (B) burial from the seventh- to tenth-century cemetery of Bevis' Grave(Ha)

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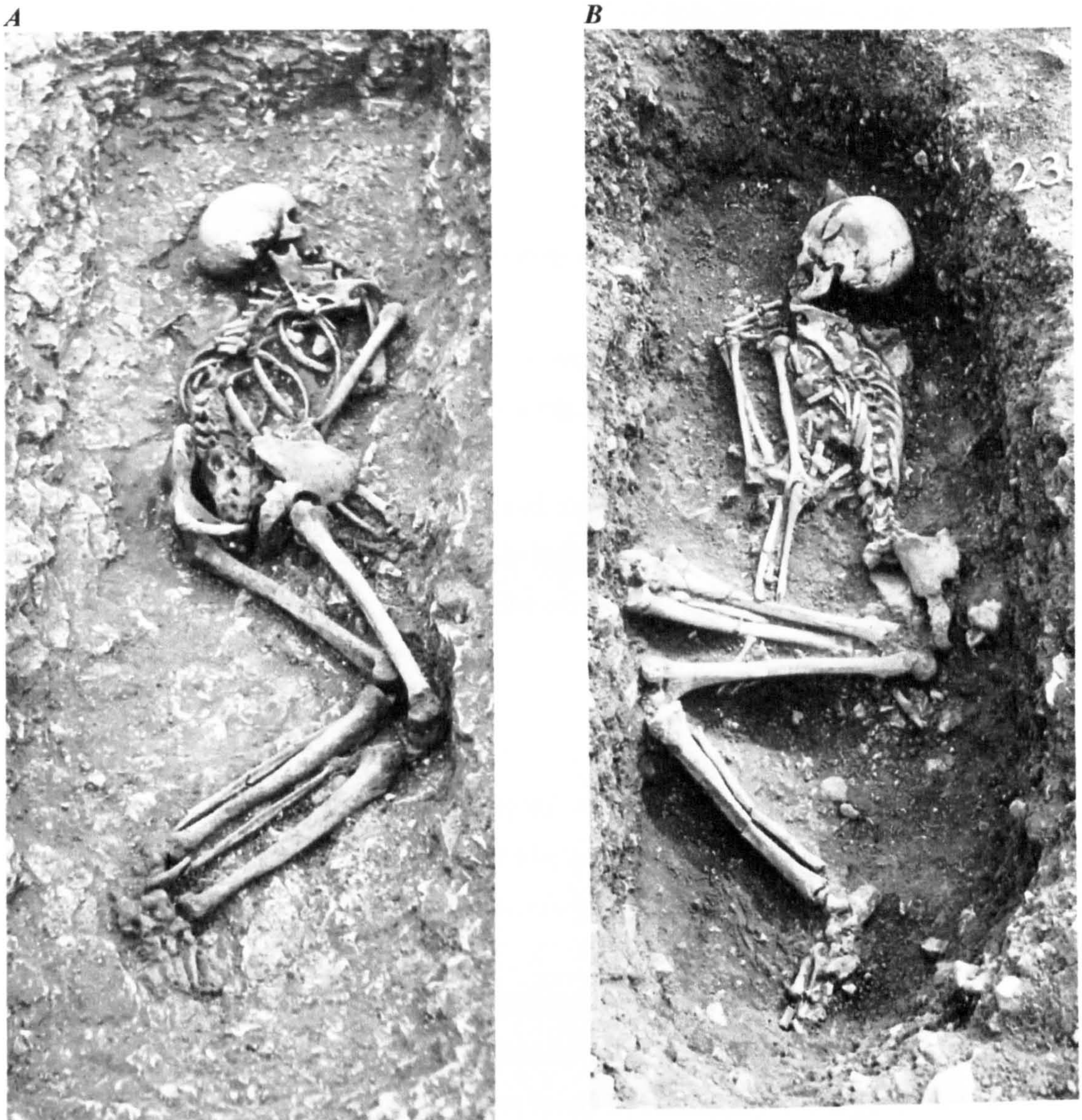


period, with a national survey of fifth- to seventh-century cemeteries placing the incidence of both practices at 5% (Stoodley 1999a:55) and the persistence of these body positions into the seventh and eighth centuries, in part, represents the continuation of earlier funerary practices. The use of less common body positions would also have marked an individual out from the rest of the community in death, although whether this distinction was based on religion, kinship or social factors is difficult to determine. Analogies have been suggested between the body position in crouched burials and that of the foetus prior to birth, possibly indicating a connection to beliefs in rebirth (Rathz, Hirst & Wright 2000:77). Conversely, some of the highly flexed crouched burials are likely to have been bound, perhaps to prevent the dead from rising *(ibid.)*. Whatever the factors were which resulted in flexed, crouched and supine burials with one leg flexed, few within the dataset were accorded these rites. Indeed, the data suggest that by the ninth century the use of these burial positions, which were never as common in the Wessex area as supine extended burial, ceased to be seen as an acceptable variant in body position by the majority of the population.

Supine burials with both legs flexed exhibited a more diffuse chronological distribution. A large proportion of the examples in the study area were found in cemeteries of seventh- and eighth-century date (table 4.3), reflecting the persistence of a body position seen in 7% of early Saxon burials (Stoodley 1999a:55). However, a few examples were found in later cemeteries including the late Saxon community burial grounds at Trowbridge (Wi) and Staple Gardens, Winchester (Ha), (figure 4.9) as well as among the small group of tenth-century burials recovered from the Westgate, Southampton (Ha) (Figure 4.10). One possible explanation for the persistence of this particular body position may be practical, with the legs being slightly flexed to allow the body to fit into undersized graves.

As with many of the burial positions considered above, prone burials within community burial grounds were confined to the early part of the study period. During the early Saxon period, the burial rite was found at very low levels in community burial grounds (Stoodley 1999:55), such as at Worthy Park (Ha) (Hawkes 2003), and the prone burials seen in the seventh-century cemetery at Camerton appear to be a continuation of this phenomenon (figure 4.11A) (Horne 1933). While the significance of prone burial within community cemeteries of the early and middle Saxon period is far from clear, several possibilities suggest themselves. It is possible that prone burial, although unusual, was just one of a number of body positions used when depositing the dead (Lucy 2000:80). Yet, prone burial is often seen as having sinister connotations, perhaps because it is the exact opposite of the

Figure 4.9. (right) A supine burial with both legs flexed from the ninth- to eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens, Winchester (Ha).
© Winchester Museums Service

Figure 4.10. A tenth- century supine burial with both legs flexed from the Westgate, Southampton (Ha).
©Southampton City Museum

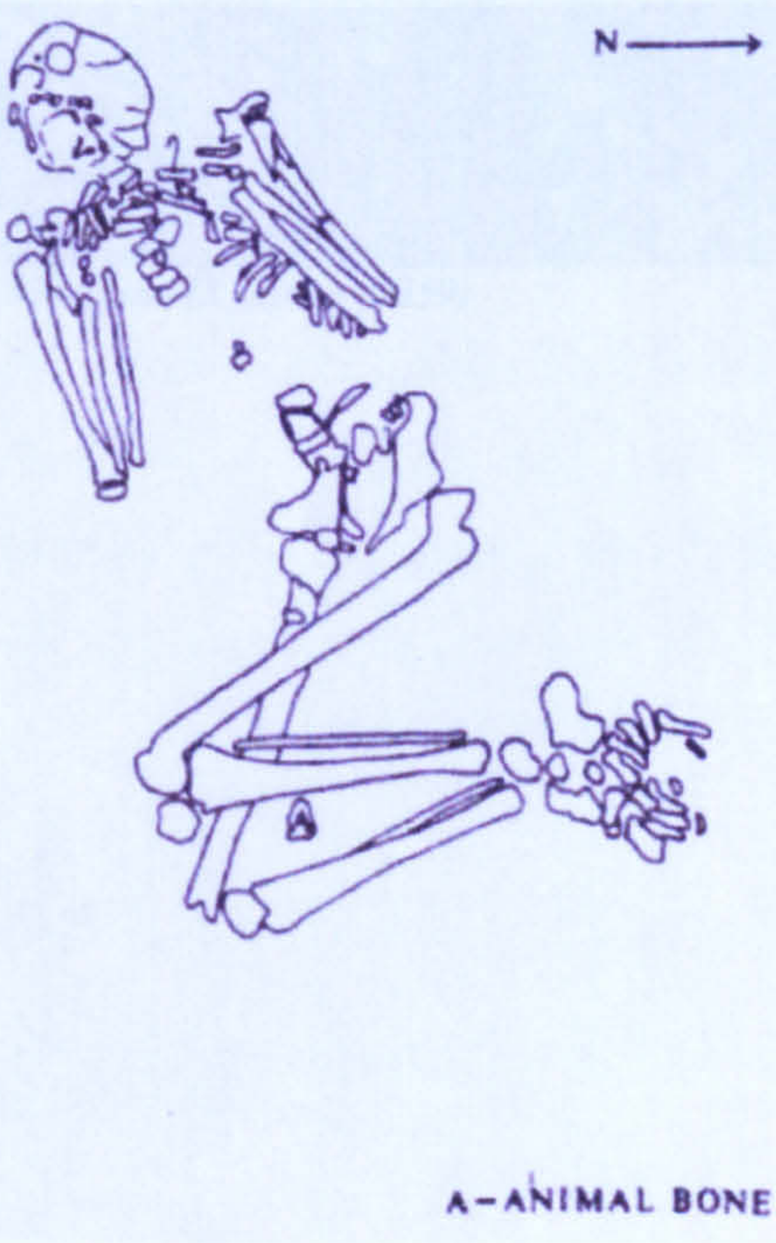
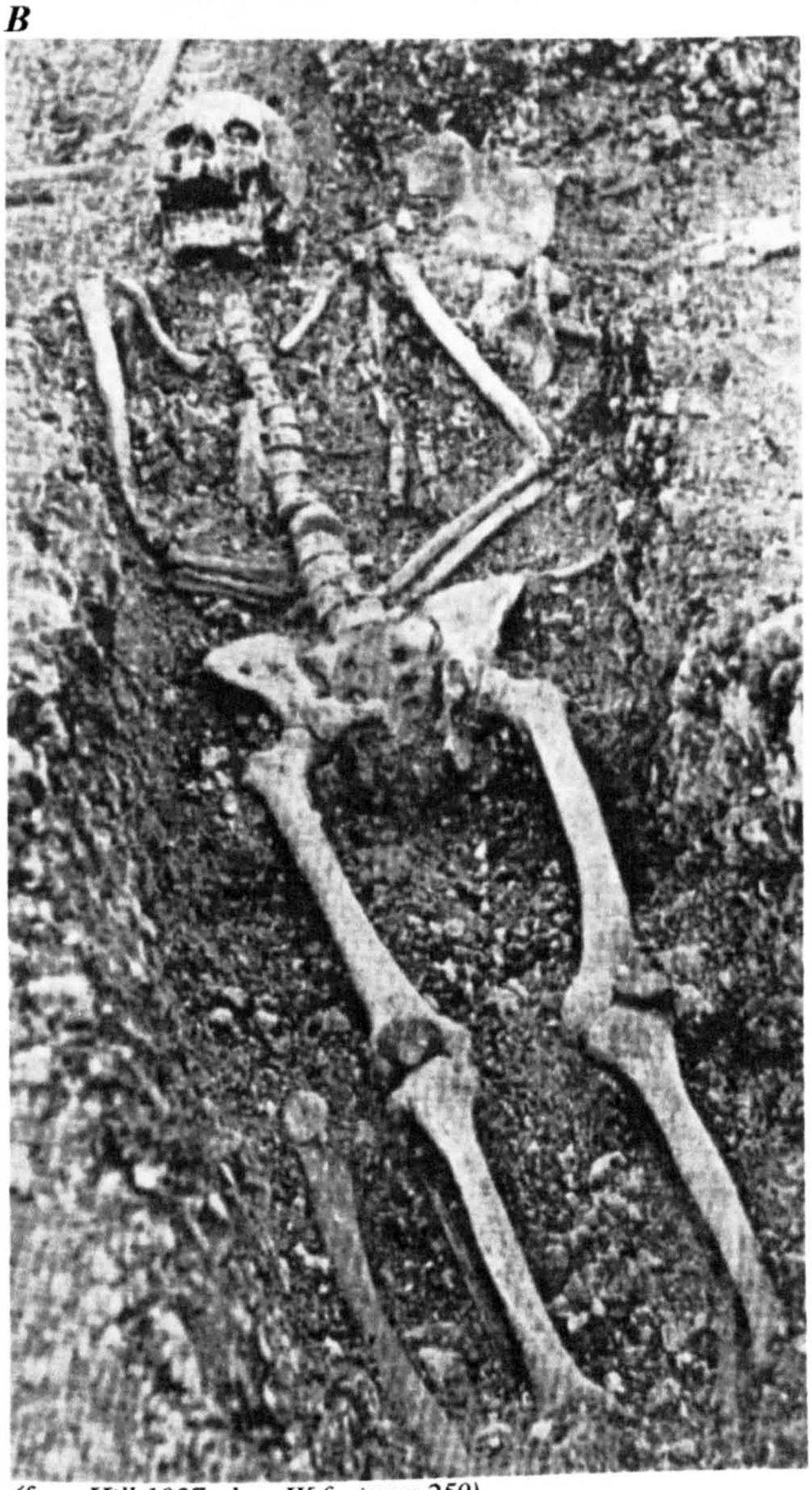


Figure 4.11. (A) Prone burial from the seventh-century cemetery at Camerton(So) (B). A west-east burial from the late Saxon cemetery at Stockbridge Down (Ha)with hands bound behind its back

A

©Somerset County Museum

B



(from Hill 1937:plate IX facing p.259)

dominant body position throughout the early medieval period, that of supine burial. As such, it is possible that in some cases, prone burial may have been a mark of disrespect to the deceased (Stoodley 1999a:56). Alternatively, prone burial may simply have been indicative of a lack of care, possibly reflecting the need to dispose rapidly of the body, perhaps because death was the result of a specific disease or violence. It is, also, possible that prone burial formed some form of ritualistic or sacrificial function *(ibid)*. Finally the possibility, however remote, of inadvertent prone burial resulting from the inversion of a coffin during burial cannot be excluded *(ibid)*. After the seventh century, prone burial disappears from community cemeteries within the study area with the notable exception of the six prone burials from Beckery chapel (So) (Rahtz & Hirst 1974). It is unclear why prone burials would be found within a cemetery that appears to serve a predominately male monastic community, but it has been postulated that those individuals interred face down were guilty of committing some form of mortal sin or that the prone position in this case represents some form of penance (Rahtz 1993:121).

Overall, across the study period, the pattern is one of increasing dominance of supine burial and the virtual disappearance of other body positions. The only exceptions to this general trend were the late Saxon "execution" cemeteries, where the body positions, such as prone, flexed, and supine flexed, persisted to the end of the eleventh century and beyond. Nine (50%) of the prone burials within the study area are from execution cemeteries at Meon Hill (Liddell 1933), Stockbridge Down (Hill 1937) and Old Dairy Cottage (Winchester Museums Service ODC89). These cemeteries also contain eight (47%) of the post-eighth century examples of supine burials with both legs flexed within the dataset and 3 (75%) of post-eighth-century supine burials with one leg flexed and one extended. Execution cemeteries, which are characterised by prone burials, decapitation and evidence for binding of hands (Reynolds 1997:37), are thought to contain primarily the remains of those executed for criminal activities and excluded from burial in consecrated ground (Reynolds 1999a:105). Three, possibly four, inhumations from Meon Hill, and two burials from Stockbridge Down had been decapitated, while another four or possibly five decapitated skeletons were found at Old Dairy Cottage. In addition, four individuals, two from Old Dairy Cottage, one from Stockbridge Down (figure 4.11B) and two from Meon Hill, appear to have had their hands bound behind their backs.[11]

[11] Hanging appears to have been the usual method of execution during the early medieval period and it has been suggested that bound hands may, in some cases, indicate hanging (Reynolds 1999:105).

In the execution cemeteries of the later Saxon period, non-supine extended burials had far less favourable connotations than in the seventh and eighth centuries.[12] No longer were they simply acceptable variants in body position as they appear to have been in the community burial grounds of the middle Saxon period, but instead the use of these body positions was indicative of a general lack of care and respect towards those excluded from burial in the churchyard cemeteries of late Saxon England. The prone burials which characterise execution cemeteries may simply be the result of the general lack of care accorded all burials within these cemeteries, which resulted in some individuals being buried face down. Indeed, it is possible that certain individuals within these cemeteries were purposely accorded the added indignity of prone burial following execution, perhaps as a reflection of specific criminal activities. What does seem clear is that, by the later Saxon period, prone burial appears to have been seen as a mark of disrespect, with links to crime and punishment. If prone burial had always had these connotations, it may imply that prone burials in cemeteries of the early Saxon period were accorded to those guilty of breaching accepted codes of behaviour (Reynolds 1997:37). Initially, such individuals were allowed to be interred within community burial grounds but later, from the seventh or eighth century onwards, this became unacceptable with these individuals being excluded from community burial grounds and interred instead within execution cemeteries. However, the possibility that prone burial may have initially, in the early Saxon period, been a normal variant of body position (Lucy 2000:80), only acquiring less favourable connotations in the later Saxon period cannot be excluded.

Aside from supine burials, all of the body positions considered in detail above have one thing in common; they are all virtually absent from community burial grounds after the eighth century. It is clear that the cemeteries of the seventh and eighth centuries contain a far greater diversity of burial positions than those of a later date, but why? One possibility is that this increasing uniformity was the result of the use of coffins or shrouds. In addition, the use of this supine extended position could have been a means of maximising the number of bodies that could be squeezed into the increasingly overcrowded later Saxon churchyards. So did body position cease to be a medium to convey information in the later Saxon period, or perhaps the very uniformity in itself was a signal? Conceivably, a supine extended burial indicated that the individual had been accorded the appropriate funerary rites according to contemporary mores with all due care and attention. Perhaps a supine extended body position may have indicated that this individual was or had been an integral part of late

[12] Prone burial may have had sinister connotations in the seventh- and eighth-centuries. See section 4.3.4. for a more detailed discussion.

Figure 4.12. Frequency of grave orientations within dataset

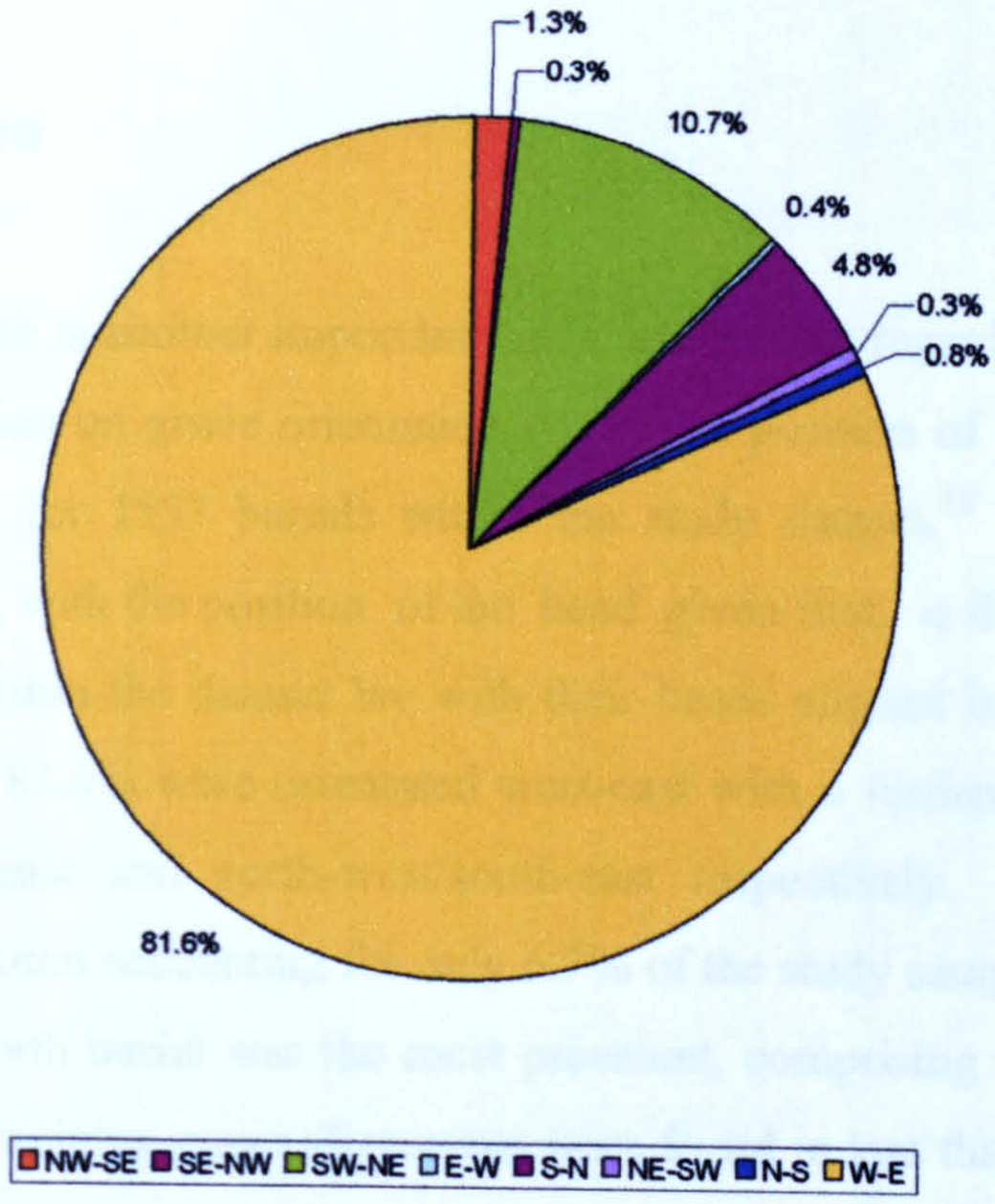


Table 4.4. Non W-E orientated graves by site

Site	Date	No. of burials	E-W	NE-SW	N-S	SE-NW	S-N
Tinney's Lane (Do)	5th-7th century	1	-	-	1	-	-
Poundbury (Do)	6th-7th century	3	-	1	-	-	-
Portway West (Ha)	Late 6th-7th century	17	-	-	-	-	9
Bargates (Do)	Late 6th-early 7th centuy	30	-	-	-	2	1
Stonehenge (Wi)	7th century	1	-	1	-	-	-
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	7th century	15	-	1	-	-	-
Trumpet Major (Do)	7th century	8	-	-	1	-	-
Snell's Corner (Ha)	7th century	33	-	-	1	-	19
Burghfield (Bk)	7th century	50	-	-	-	-	1
Didcot (Ox)	7th century	17	1	1	1	-	3
Long Wittenham II (Ox)	7th century	11	-	-	-	-	3
Winkelbury Hill II (Wi)	&th century	30	1	-	-	-	-
Alvediston (Wi)	Late 7th century	1	-	-	-	-	1
Winnall II (Ha)	Late 7th century	47	1	-	-	-	-
Rodmead Down (Wi)	7th – early 8th century	1	-	1	-	-	-
Bevis Grave (Ha)	7th-10th century	88	-	-	-	-	2
Oliver's Battery (Ha)	Late 7th -early 8th century	1	-	-	-	-	1
The Fox, Purton (Wi)	Late 7th-early 8th century	11 or 12	-	-	1	-	-
Lowbury Hill (Ox)	Late 7th-early 8th century	2	-	-	-	-	1
St. Mary's Stadium I (Ha)	Late 7th early 8th century	24	-	-	-	-	4
Cook Street (Ha)	Early 8th century	19	1	-	-	-	2
Wells Cathedral (So)	Mid-late Saxon	242	1	-	-	-	-
Staple Gardens (Ha)	9th -11th century	288	-	-	4	-	-
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	105	1	-	-	-	-
Stockbridge Down (Ha)	11th century	41	1	1	-	2	4
Meon Hill (Ha)	Mid –Late Saxon	10	-	-	-	-	8
Old Dairy Cottage (Ha)	9th-11th century	17	-	-	-	-	14

Saxon society in a way that those deposited without any respect in the late Saxon execution cemeteries were not.

4.4. Grave Orientation

The orientation of the grave is another important factor to consider regarding the deposition of the deceased. Information on grave orientation where the position of the head could be determined was available for 1557 burials within the study dataset.[13] The frequency of different grave alignments, with the position of the head given first, is illustrated in figure 4.12. 93.6% of burials within the dataset lay with their heads aligned between north-west and south-west. Of these, 81.6% were orientated west-east with a further 10.7% and 1.3% aligned south-west/north-east and north-west/south-east respectively. All other grave orientations were less common accounting for only 6.7% of the study sample. Of these other grave alignments, south-north burial was the most prevalent, comprising 4.8% of the study sample. All of the other remaining grave alignments were found in less than 1% of the study sample.

The prevalence of different grave alignments varies across the study period. Not surprisingly, westerly aligned graves are dominant across the entire study period. In contrast, other grave alignments are predominantly confined to the seventh and early eighth centuries (table 4.4). While a diversity of grave alignments are found in early Saxon cemeteries, there is evidence that the seventh century saw an increasing diversity in grave orientation (Stoodley 1999a:64), and this appears to be reflected in the variation seen in the burials within this study sample. It is far from clear why there was a greater diversity in grave orientation during the seventh century. Variations away from a west-east alignment were found in both community burial grounds and isolated burials, including richly furnished barrow burials such as those at Lowbury Hill (Ox) (Atkinson 1916:16) and Rodmead Down (Wi) (Meaney 1964:273), suggesting that such variations were part of the accepted range of funerary practices. In some communities, such as at Snell's Corner where most of the graves of known alignment lie south-north, non west-east aligned burial appears to have been the preferred grave orientation. At other sites, such as Bevis Grave (Ha) (Rudkin 2001) and Winnall II (Ha) (Meaney & Hawkes 1970) which contain only one or two burials not aligned

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[13] If grave orientations were given in published reports and/or archives, they were used. When this information was not supplied and a plan of the site was available, grave alignments were determined by measuring through the skeleton. The alignments are for each burial so if a grave contains more than one body each body is counted separately.

approximately west-east, variation in grave orientation may have been used to distinguish certain individuals in death.

Burials in cemeteries that post-date the mid-eighth century are almost invariably west-east aligned. There are, however, occasional exceptions. The cemeteries at Barnstaple Castle (Dv) and Wells Cathedral (So) both contain one east-west aligned burial, an adult male and a child respectively (Miles 1986b:66; Rodwell 2001:564). These burials, which lie in the opposite alignment from the standard west-east orientation, may be the result of errors during burial with a coffined or shrouded body inadvertently placed in the grave the wrong way round (Miles 1986:66). Alternatively, it has been suggested that the Barnstaple burial could be a priest who would rise to face his parishioners on the Day of Judgement, although others have suggested that the burial of priests with their heads to the east is a post-medieval practice (Rathz 1978:4). The late Saxon cemetery at Staple Gardens (Ha) contains four north-south burials (1.4% of cemetery population). Three of these burials lie within a single grave found at the lowest excavated levels and may represent one of the earliest graves in the cemetery although the lack of stratigraphic information makes it difficult to determine the relationship between these burials and the rest of the cemetery (Winchester Museums Services archive SG84; G. Scobie *pers. comm.*). The other north-south burial at Staple Gardens is of a child, who lies in a single grave within the cemetery, and there is no obvious explanation why this individual was not interred on a west-east alignment.

The only exceptions to the general chronological trend of the increasing dominance of west-east aligned burial across the study period are execution cemeteries. The execution cemeteries of Stockbridge Down (Ha) (Hill 1937) and Old Dairy Cottage (Ha) (Winchester Museums Service ODC89) contain twenty-two (78.5%) of the twenty-eight non-west-east aligned burials within the study dataset that post-date the mid-eighth century (table 4.4) (figures 4.13 & 4.14).[14] Random orientation of burials is seen as one of the characteristics of execution cemeteries (Reynolds 1997:37) and should be seen as a result of the lack of care taken in burying those excluded from community burial grounds in the later Saxon period.

Among the large number of westerly orientated graves within the study sample, there is considerable variation in their actual alignment from those orientated more to the north-west through to those which point more to the south-west. It has been suggested that this variation

[14] In addition, all of the burials of known orientation from the execution cemetery on Meon Hill are aligned south-north (table 4.4) (Liddel 1933:134), but the burials cannot definitely be dated to later than the mid-eighth century (*ibid.*:136-7).

Figure 4.13. View from the north across the eleventh- century execution cemetery at Stockbridge Down (Ha) illustrating the variation in grave orientation.

(from Hill 1937:plate IV facing pg.254)

Figure 4.14. Burials 14 and 15 from the eleventh-century cemetery at Stockbridge Down viewed from the east

(from Hill 1937:plate VIII facing pg. 258)

may be the result of aligning graves towards the sun (Wells & Green 1973; Hawkes 1976; Rathz 1978:5-6). However, it seems more probable that variations in the alignment of westerly orientated graves are the result of a number of factors. Some are general, such as the errors of varying degrees of magnitude that are likely to occur when trying to align a grave in any one direction and which would produce a distribution of alignments, not dissimilar from the variation seen in a number of cemeteries with westerly orientated burials (Boddington 1990:191-2). Others factors may be site specific, such as variations in the alignment due to topographical and structural features within the cemetery (*ibid.*; Rahtz 1978:2). For example, the alignments of the westerly orientated burials from Exeter Cathedral fell into two distinct clusters (Henderson & Bidwell 1982:152). It has been suggested that the two clusters were aligned with two different buildings – the late Saxon Minster and an earlier structure – and that the two alignments may represent two distinct chronological phases within the cemetery (*ibid.*:152-3). Finally, some factors influencing grave orientations, such as the position of other burials, may be specific to only part of a cemetery (Rahtz 1978:3) resulting in localised variations in burial.

Westerly orientated burials are often considered to be synonymous with Christianity, yet west-east burial was also the predominant grave orientation among the non-Christian population of early Saxon England (Stoodley 1999a:63). As such, grave orientation cannot be used as an indicator of religious affiliation (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:53). So, if the majority of the population were already being buried in a west-east orientation, did the Church have any impact on burial orientation? The evidence from the study area demonstrates a shift from low levels of non-west-east aligned graves in the mid Saxon period to virtually universal west-east burial in the late Saxon period. What is less clear is if this shift in burial orientation was part of an already on-going process, or whether the arrival of the Church acted as a catalyst in the elimination of non-west-east burial from community burial grounds.

4.5. Disturbing the dead

The sentiment "may they rest in peace" is often spoken of the dead, yet the reality is commonly often very different. For many interred in burial grounds and in particularly in churchyards during the early medieval period, their mortal remains were disturbed, displaced or destroyed by the bodies of later generations or by building work, be it ecclesiastical or secular.

4.5.1. Evidence for the post-burial treatment of the deceased from early medieval Wessex

Table 4.5 summarises the level of post-burial disturbance during the early medieval period in twenty cemeteries from the study area containing more than fifteen burials.[15] Twelve of the sites were field cemeteries, not associated with any ecclesiastical buildings. Of the twelve, eleven were rural burial grounds founded during the late sixth and seventh centuries and were usually short-lived, with ten of the eleven going out of use by or during the eighth century. There is one slightly atypical cemetery among these eleven sites, the long-lived burial ground of Bevis Grave (Ha) (Rudkin 2001), which, although founded in the seventh century, continued in use until the tenth. The remaining field cemetery, the small cemetery at Cook Street which was in use during the eighth century (Garner 1993 & 2001; Garner & Vincent 1997), included within the study, differed from the others both by virtue of its later foundation date and in that it was not rural, but lay within the middle Saxon emporium of Hamwic. In general, lower levels of post-burial disturbance were observed in the twelve field cemeteries. Seven of the field cemeteries – Bargates; Winnall II; Monkton Deverill; Snell's Corner; Didcot; Burghclere and SOU 862 in Southampton – exhibited no evidence for the post-burial disturbance of graves (table 4.5), although a number of these sites had been subject to disturbance after 1100AD. The remaining six cemeteries – Portsdown II, Ulwell, St. Mary's Stadium cemetery I, Bevis Grave and Cook Street – exhibited low or low-moderate levels of post-burial disturbance.

The remaining eight cemeteries are either known or suspected to be associated with churches and are examples of the early medieval churchyards, which gradually replaced the field cemeteries from the seventh century onwards. Unlike the majority of the field cemeteries that they superseded, many of the churchyards were long-lived with burial continuing throughout the late Saxon period, and beyond, into the medieval or post-medieval periods. Six of the eight lie within urban centres, while the manorial churchyard at Trowbridge and the monastic cemetery associated with Beckery Chapel are in rural contexts. Higher levels of post-burial disturbance were observed in the majority of the churchyards, or suspected churchyards, with the study sample. Six of the eight churchyards – Barnstaple; Exeter Cathedral; SOU 13 in Southampton; Staple Gardens in Winchester; Wells Cathedral and Trowbridge (Wi) – exhibited either moderate, moderate–high or high levels of post-burial

[15] It proved to be difficult to quantify the levels of post-burial disturbance in the cemeteries due to variations in the quality of recording and the degree of post-eleventh-century disturbance between sites. As such, a descriptive system was used which categorised the levels of disturbance as none, low, moderate and high.

Table 4.5. The level and nature of post-burial disturbance[1] seen in early medieval cemeteries in Wessex.

Site	Date of site	Type of site	No. of burials	Ecclesiastical buildings	Level of post burial disturbance	Nature of disturbance
Bargates (Do)	Late 6th-7th century	Rural	30	No	None – but no bone survives	None of graves intercut
Winnall II (Ha)	7th century	Rural	47	No	None	-
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	c. 7th century	Rural	15	No	None	-
Portsdown II (Ha)	7th century	Rural	21	No	Low-moderature	Re-use of 2 graves
Snell's Corner (Ha)	7th century	Rural	33	No	None	-
Ulwell (Do)	7th century	Rural	55	No	Low-moderate	Re-use & intercutting of graves
Bevis Grave (Ha)	7th-10th century	Rural	88	No	Low-moderate	Re-use of 11 graves, intercutting of three graves.
Didcot (Ox)	7th century	Rural	17	No	None	-
Burghclere (Bk)	7th century	Rural		No	None- but no bone survives	No intercutting of graves
SOU 862 (Ha)		Rural	16	No	None	-
St. Mary's Stadium (Ha)	Late seventh-early eighth century	Rural	23	No	Low	8 graves disturbed by later middle Saxon pits
Beckery Chapel (So)	Middle Saxon	Monastic	58	Timber chapel or tomb shrine	Low	Number of burials disturbed by construction of late Saxon/Norman chapel II or later chapel III
SOU 13 (Ha)	8th-nineth century	Urban	81	Timber church	High	Approximately 1/3 of bodies redeposited, many others loss parts of body to later burials
Cook Street (Ha)	Early 8th century	Urban	21	No	Low	1 intercut burial
Staple Gardens (Ha)	Mid 9th-11th century	Urban	288	Church suspected	Moderate-high	Intercutting burials
Bath Abbey	Late Saxon	Urban	31	Abbey church	Low	1 intercut burial & charnel pit from construction of Norman abbey
Barnstaple (Dv)	Late Saxon	Urban	105	Church suspected	Moderate	Intercutting of graves & a few burials disturbed by construction of moat of Norman castle
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Middle-late Saxon	Urban	114	Minster church	Moderate-high	Intercutting burials & some burials disturbed by construction work
Wells Cathedral (So)	Middle-late Saxon	Urban	242	Minster church/ Cathedral	Moderate	Intercutting burials & graves disturbed by later buildings.
Trowbridge (Wi)	10th-early 12th century	Manorial	164	Church	Moderate	Intercutting rows of burials, with later rows disturbing earlier burials.

[1] Only including evidence of post-burial disturbance that occurred during the early medieval period.

disturbance. Low levels of post-burial disturbance were observed in the remaining two churchyards – Bath Abbey and Beckery Chapel.[16]

The number of burials in a cemetery appears to have been an important factor with high levels of post-burial disturbance observed in larger cemeteries within the sample, while smaller cemeteries tended to exhibit lower levels. As most of the large cemeteries within the study were the churchyards and the majority of the field cemeteries are comparatively small, it could be argued that the differences in levels of post-burial disturbance seen among the two types of burial ground can be attributed to disparities in size. Yet the largest of the field cemeteries, the long-lived Bevis Grave, still exhibits a lower level of post-burial disturbance than seen in the most of the churchyard cemeteries, although it does have a higher level of disturbance than many of the field cemeteries. This suggests that size alone does not fully account for the differences seen in the levels of post-burial disturbance between the field cemeteries and churchyards.

4.5.2. The nature of post-burial disturbance seen in the study area

The differences between field cemeteries and churchyards were not confined to the level of post-burial disturbance, but also extended to the nature of the post-burial disturbance. Most post-burial disturbance observed in the field cemeteries was the result of re-using graves. This involved reopening a grave and inserting a secondary or tertiary burial, with the remains of the original occupant or occupants usually being either displaced to the sides of the grave, as in grave 42 at Bevis' Grave (Rudkin 2001) (figure 4.15), or re-deposited above the later burial as part of the grave fill, as in grave five at Portsdown II (Ha) (figure 4.16) (Corney 1967:23). While the re-use of graves is generally characterised by a lack of respect towards the original occupant, occasionally care was taken not to disturb the original occupant when adding additional burials to a grave, as with burials 99 and 100 at Wells (Rodwell 2001:67). In this example, there is a greater level of respect towards the original occupants and it may be that the motives that lay behind the insertion of additional burials may differ in these

[16] Density of burial across a churchyard is known to vary with the highest concentration of graves usually found in the vicinity of the church and around important features within the graveyard, such as saint's graves. Examples of churchyards with a higher density of burial in the vicinity of the church include Trowbridge (Graham and Davies 1993, 35 & 47), Raunds Furnells (Boddington 1996, 27) and North Elmham (Wade-Martin 1980, 186). A high density of burials was found clustered around the grave of St. Swithun at Winchester (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 223). Thus, if only a small part of a churchyard has been excavated, particularly when as at Wells and Exeter the excavated area is adjacent to the church, the density of burial observed may not be entirely representative of the churchyard as a whole. Yet, even with the potential complications caused by variations in burial density, the high levels of post-burial disturbance seen in Wessex's early medieval churchyards is markedly higher than that seen in the field cemeteries.

Figure 4.15. (left). The secondary burial in grave 49 at Bevis' Grave, Ha. The remains of the original two occupants have been displaced to the edges of the grave.

(© Portsmouth City Museum)

Figure 4.16. (right)Grave 5 from the seventh-century cemetery at Portsdown. This grave has been re-used with the remains of the primary burial (indicated by shading) being redeposited above the secondary burial.

Redrawn by M. Cherryson from a drawing from the Portsdown archive provided courtesy of Portsmouth Museums and Record Service.

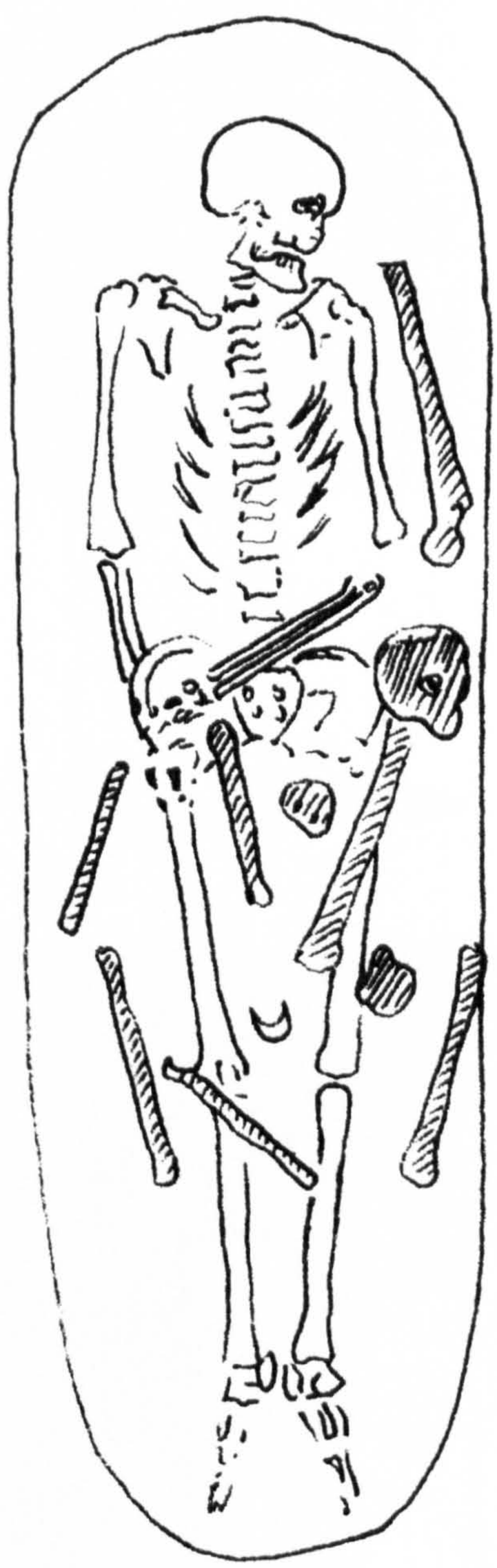


Figure 4.17. A late Saxon burial from Wells cathedral with the displaced bones of earlier burials packed around the coffin.
(from Rodwell 2001: 81)

Figure 4.18. Intercut burials from the ninth- to eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens, Winchester.
©Winchester Museums Service

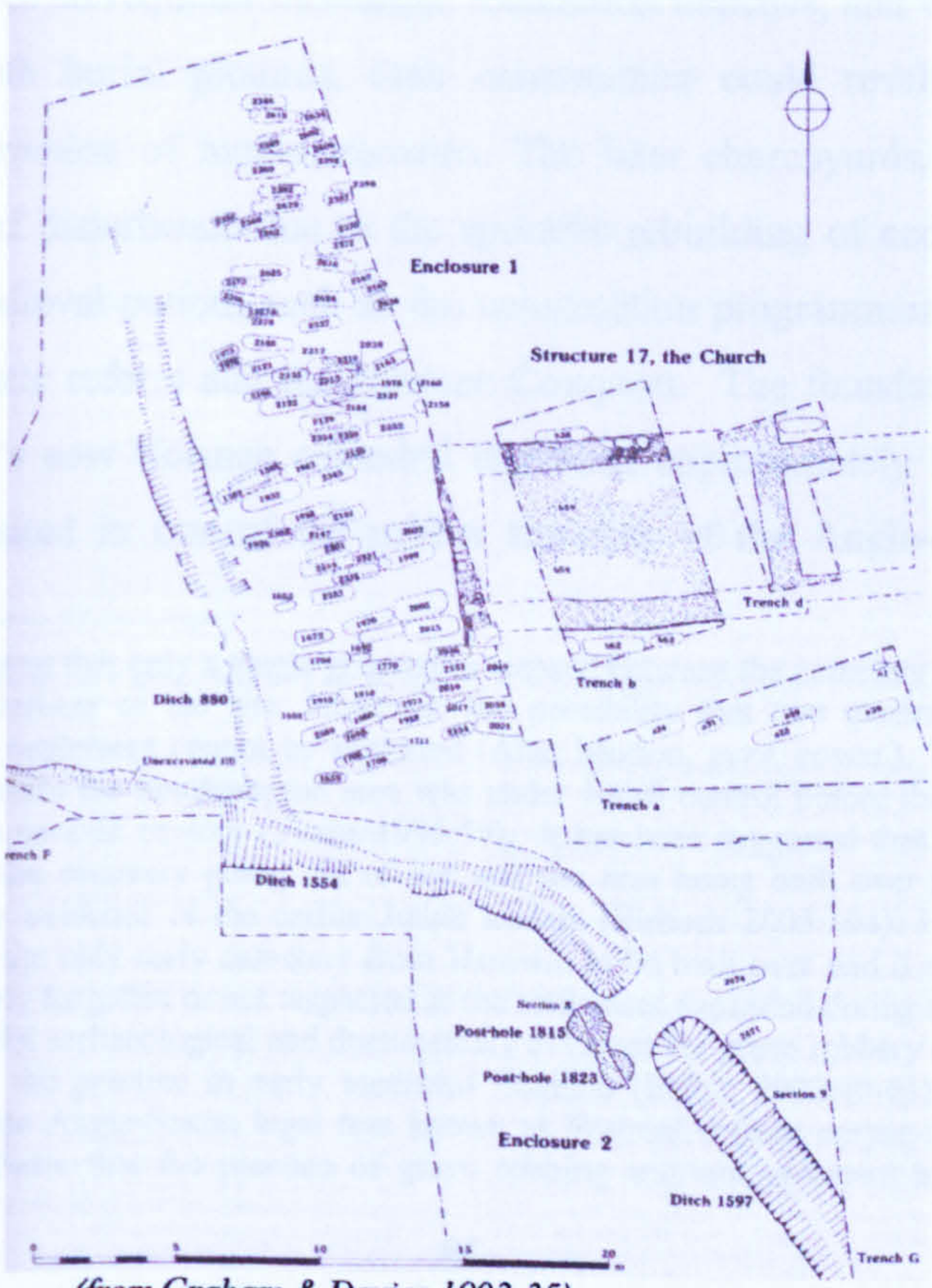
cases from those where the original burials are disturbed. The factors lying behind the re-use of graves is unclear. Traditionally, they have been interpreted as family plots, and in some cases, especially where later burials have been inserted with care not to disturb earlier occupants, this may be a possibility (Stoodley 2002:114). Yet for many others, this is less likely due to the lack of care exhibited towards the original occupant and in these cases the re-use either represents the accidental disturbance of earlier burials *(ibid.)* or purposeful re-use of earlier graves.

The churchyard cemeteries exhibited a different pattern of post-burial disturbance. Although examples of the single or double re-use of graves similar to the pattern seen in field cemeteries can be found in churchyards, such as the example from Wells Cathedral (figure 4.17), the major cause of the post-burial disturbance in the churchyards resulted from the intercutting of burials. While low levels of intercutting were observed in a few of the field cemeteries, high levels were generally the preserve of the larger late churchyard cemeteries, such as Staple Gardens in Winchester (figure 4.18), Trowbridge and SOU 13 in Southampton. At Trowbridge, the earlier burials were interred in rows with later burials inserted between the earlier rows, a process which led to parts of the earlier burials being disturbed (Graham and Davies 1993:33). Similarly the rows of burials on either side of the church at SOU 13 had been reworked five times, resulting in the redeposition of a third of all burials, with many others losing skeletal parts due to being cut by later graves (Morton 1992b:72). In other churchyards, such as Staple Gardens, and Wells Cathedral, the higher density of burials makes it difficult to determine the spatial layout of the cemetery at any given time and therefore to determine whether there was any systematic pattern to the post-burial disturbance.

The other major cause of post-burial disturbance during this period was the construction of structures associated with domestic and ecclesiastical occupation. Much of the evidence for this type of disturbance comes from urban contexts, such as the middle Saxon *wic* site of Hamwic. The settlement contained a number of small short-lived cemeteries (Morton 1992b:68), the sites of which once abandoned were used for domestic occupation as the settlement expanded in the eighth century *(ibid.:*74). In some cases, little time elapsed once a burial ground went out of use before the domestic occupation. For example, the earliest evidence for domestic occupation on the site of the St Mary's Stadium cemetery post-dates

Figure 4.19. Part of the eighth- to ninth-century cemetery at SOU 13 in Southampton with several phases of burial shown viewed from the east. There was a lull in the cemetery's use when the pit visible in the upper left of the figure was dug in the cemetery. It disturbed burial 30 (second from left) resulting in the skull being pushed back into the coffin space. Two displaced skulls are also visible at the top of the figure.

Figure 4.20. Plan of earliest phases of burial at the tenth- to twelfth-century cemetery at Trowbridge depicting boundary ditch.



(from Graham & Davies 1993:35)

the graves by at most one or two generations (Birbeck 2005:194),[17] with eight of the graves being damaged by later middle Saxon pits (*ibid.*:27).

The type of disturbance associated with pits can be seen in figure 4.19, which illustrates part of another Hamwic cemetery, SOU 13. A pit cuts through the cemetery in the upper left quarter of the photograph, disturbing grave 30 (the second burial from the left) with the occupant's head being pushed back into the coffin space. The two isolated skulls represent disturbed remains deposited into the pit. One skull is thought to belong to grave 33 (the fourth skeleton from the left) and was probably disturbed when the pit was dug, while the origins of the other skull are unclear. Usually, disturbance resulting from pits is limited to those parts of the skeleton directly cut by the pit with the rest of the skeleton remaining *in situ*. Occasionally, the discovery of human remains leads to the complete excavation of the grave, as at the richly furnished St Mary's Stadium cemetery (Ha), where the discovery of one end of a grave while digging a pit during the middle Saxon period led to it being completely emptied probably in the search for grave goods, with the displaced human remains being deposited into the pit (Birbeck 2005:33).[18]

The tenth and eleventh centuries saw an increasing use of stone for the construction of ecclesiastical buildings, fortifications, such as castles, and, occasionally, domestic buildings. These stone structures all required substantial foundation trenches, and when these buildings were associated with burial grounds, their construction could result in the substantial disturbance or destruction of human remains. The later churchyards, in particular, were prone to this type of disturbance due to the sporadic rebuilding of ecclesiastical buildings during the early medieval period, such as the construction programmes associated with the tenth-century monastic reform and the Norman Conquest. The foundation trenches for the nave of Winchester's new Norman cathedral displaced approximately 1000 burials, whose remains were deposited in one of the robber trenches of the Anglo-Saxon Old Minster

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[17] Birbeck 2005:194 suggest that only a single generation elapsed between the cemetery going out of use and the advent of domestic settlement of the site. However, the possibility that two generations may separate the cemetery from the later settlement cannot be excluded (Alan Morton, *pers. comm.*). The St. Mary's Stadium cemetery was founded while the Southampton area was under Jutish control before the area came under West Saxon control in the late seventh century (Yorke 1995:59). It has been suggested that the short period of time which elapsed between the cemetery going out of use and the area being built over may represent the West Saxons trying to remove evidence of the earlier Jutish leaders (Birbeck 2005:194). However, the St. Mary's stadium cemetery is not the only early cemetery from Hamwic to be built over and it may be that these earlier burial grounds were simply forgotten or not respected as the settlement expanded during the eighth century.

[18] While there is substantial archaeological and documentary evidence for grave robbery on the continent, there is little clear evidence for the practice in early medieval England (Effros 2002:49-61). However, it has been suggested that a short late Anglo-Saxon legal text known as Walreaf defines corpse-robbery as the action of outlaws, which may indicate that the practice of grave robbing was not unknown in Anglo-Saxon England (Wormald 1999:372).

(Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:227). Similarly, the partially excavated charnel pit at Bath Abbey contained the remains of at least 33 adults, whose remains are thought to have been disturbed during the construction of the Norman abbey (Bell 1996:51). The Norman Conquest led not only to the rebuilding of many ecclesiastical buildings but to the appearance of castles, in both urban and rural locations. The insertion of castles into the crowded urban centres of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries was far from simple and resulted in the use of any available open space, which more often than not was the town's burial ground. The association between late Saxon cemeteries and Norman castles is well documented (Hadley 2001:40) and several examples, all dating to the early twelfth century, are found in the study area at Barnstaple (Miles 1986b), Trowbridge (Graham & Davies 1993) and Taunton (Clements 1984).[19] In the case of both Trowbridge and Barnstaple, it is the defensive banks of the castle which overlie the cemetery, in effect sealing rather than disturbing the late Saxon graves, (Miles 1986b:62; Graham & Davies 1993:63). At Barnstaple, there is, however, evidence for the reburial within a single grave of at least three bodies disturbed by the construction of the moat (Miles 1986b:66). In addition, nine of the graves excavated at Barnstaple were completely empty, containing no evidence for the presence of human remains or any indication in the form of nails or wood stains that any coffin may have been present (*ibid.*:68). It has been suggested that the occupants of these graves may have been exhumed, perhaps by their families, and moved to other churchyards prior to a castle being built over the cemetery. Whether the placing of the defensive banks represents a conscious decision to minimise the damage to the burials caused by the construction of the castle at Barnstaple and Trowbridge is unclear, but the fragmentary evidence from Taunton suggests it was not always an important consideration, with the disturbed and intact remains of the occupants of the late Saxon cemetery underlying the inner and outer wards of the castle.

The ultimate fate of those human remains disturbed by later activities was by and large governed by ease and convenience of disposal. When burials were disturbed by later graves, the displaced remains were either packed around the intrusive body or deposited into the open grave as it was backfilled. Similarly, those remains disturbed by pits or buildings were usually deposited in the nearest convenient hole in the ground, such as the pit which disturbed the burial, as at St. Mary's Stadium (Birbeck 2005:33) or trenches created by the robbing of stone for the new building, as at Winchester (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:227). If there was nothing available, then pits may have been dug to take the displaced remains, such as at Portchester Castle where two burials thought to have been disturbed by the rebuilding of a

[19] Burials thought to be part of an early graveyard pre-dating the castle have been found under Old Sherborne Castle (Do) (Bayley & Harrison 1978).

masonry structure were reburied in small pits (Cunliffe 1976:60-61). Alternatively, in some cases the skeletal remains were simply scattered over the site often becoming mixed in with the rubbish (Morton 1992b:74). Occasionally, charnel deposits were housed in more elaborate settings as was the case at Wells Cathedral, where a Roman mausoleum was re-used as an Anglo-Saxon ossuary (Rodwell 20001:75).[20] The structure contained the remains of at least 41 individuals and the pattern of deposition suggests the bones were deposited over a period of time before the structure was finally sealed in the tenth century *(ibid 78)*. Where the bones originate from is unclear, but the use of the ossuary as a place to deposit disturbed remains from coffins and tombs has been suggested. Finally, mention should be made of the use of disarticulated skulls as "pillow stones" in six graves at Trowbridge (Graham & Davies 1993:41).[21] This behaviour mimics the later Saxon practice of placing stones around the skull (Hadley 2001:98).[22]

4.4.2. Post-burial disturbance and the development of churchyard burial

While evidence for the post-burial disturbance of the dead in the Wessex heartlands is found throughout the early medieval period, it clearly becomes more prevalent in the later Saxon churchyards. Moreover, the nature of the disturbance also changes to some extent. In the earlier cemeteries, the most prevalent type of disturbance results from the reuse of graves, with the occasional cutting of one grave by another. The pattern of disturbance seen in the later cemeteries is generally characterised by much highly levels of intercutting of graves combined with less evidence for the re-use of graves, although the true level of grave re-use may in part be obscured by the higher levels of disturbance seen in these burial grounds. The later cemeteries, particularly those associated with churchyards, are also far more likely to have been disturbed by structural features such as buildings and pits. So are the higher levels of post-burial disturbance seen in the later Saxon period a product of the advent of churchyard burial?

The Anglo-Saxon Church's increasing concern to separate the sacred from the secular appears to have been an important factor in the increased levels of post-burial disturbance seen in early medieval churchyards in Wessex. The late Saxon period saw the increasing

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[20] The sunken building at Wells has been described as a Roman mausoleum by the excavator (Rodwell 2001:43), but John Blair has recently suggested that the structure may be no earlier than the ninth or tenth century. (Blair 2004:136).

[21] Another two examples are found at the 4-6 Market Street site in Winchester Hampshire. The site contains part of the New Minster and then Cathedral cemetery, which was in use from the late tenth to early fourteenth century (Teague 1988:8).

[22] The use of stones to support the skull is discussed in more detail in section 5.2.5.

definition of churchyard cemeteries as fixed and separate spaces within the landscape, enclosed by boundaries and set apart by consecration (Thompson 2002:232). This was a custom, the documentary sources suggest, which was well established by the late tenth century (Gittos 2002:196). Evidence for the late Saxon policy of defining consecrated ground by enclosing churchyard cemeteries can be seen at Trowbridge (Wi). Here, there is clear evidence for a graveyard boundary in the form of a ditch, and given the gap between the ditch and the burials, there was probably either a low bank or hedge lying just within the ditch (figure 4.20) (Graham & Davies 1993:37). This differs from earlier cemeteries which, in general, seem to lack boundaries with burials gradually tapering off towards their peripheries, suggesting the absence of a fixed limit for burial *(*Gittos 2002:*203)*. The policy of enclosing late Saxon churchyards served to restrict the space available for burial, resulting in high levels of post-burial disturbance as the number of burials within a cemetery exceeded its capacity.

Yet the policies of the Anglo-Saxon church were not the only factors responsible for restricting the space available for burial. There was growing competition for space within the emerging urban centres of early medieval Wessex and this had a similar effect in restricting the space available for burial within towns. The changes wrought by urbanisation are best illustrated by looking at two cemeteries from the Middle Saxon *wic* site of Hamwic.[23] The early eighth-century cemetery at Cook Street (Ha) lies in the south-west corner of the middle Saxon settlement of Hamwic (Garner 2001:189). The cemetery is characterised by low levels of post-burial disturbance and well-spaced burials (see figure 4.21),[24] and has many features reminiscent of the rural cemeteries of the seventh and eighth centuries (Scull 2001:71). Figure 4.22 illustrates another Hamwic cemetery, SOU 13 (Morton 1992a), which was in use during the eighth, and possibly ninth, centuries[25] and must have been in use only one or two generations later than the Cook Street cemetery. This cemetery has a much higher density of burial with high levels of intercutting and has many of the features characteristic of churchyards of the medieval and post-medieval period (Scull 2001:71). The cemetery at SOU 13, unlike that at Cook Street, dates from after the major expansion of the settlement. This was a time when there was increased pressure on space within the settlement placing

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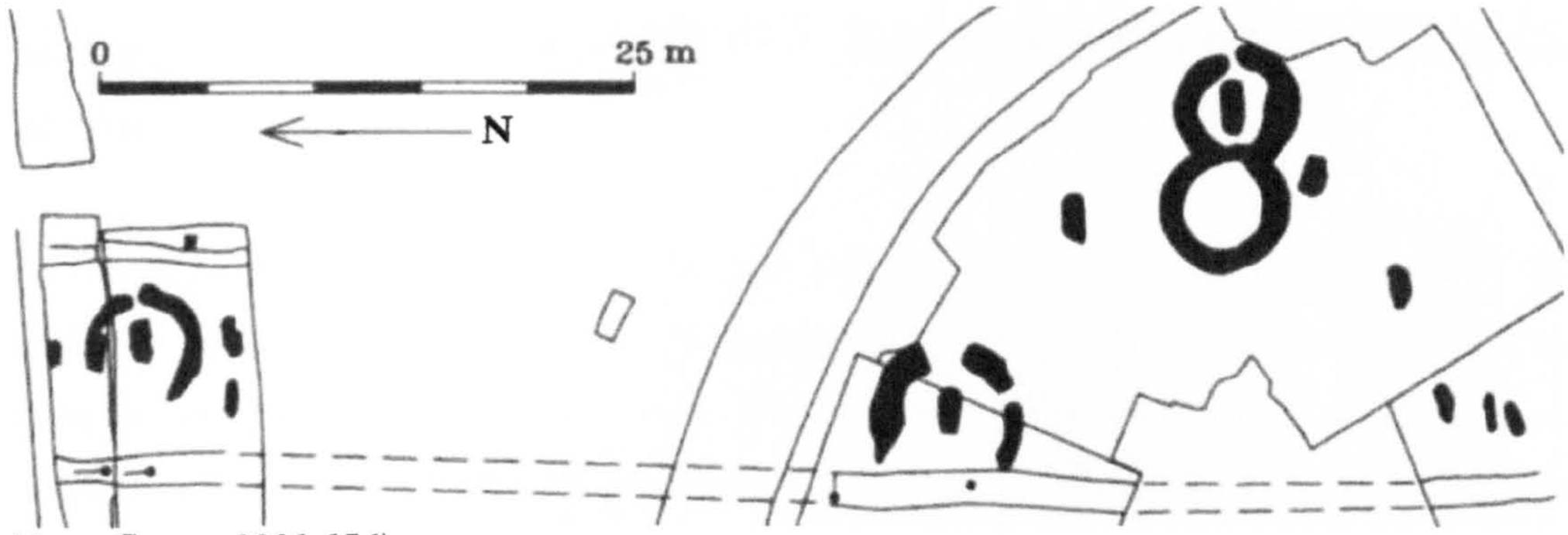
[23] There has been much debate as to whether Hamwic should be considered to be an urban centre (see section 8.1). However, for the purposes of this discussion, what is important is that Hamwic represented a settlement of greater size and density than had been seen in the previous two centuries and that it was different from comtemporary rural settlements within Wessex.

[24] Although the density of burial may originally been slightly higher as there was considerable post-medieval disturbance of the site (Garner 2001:181).

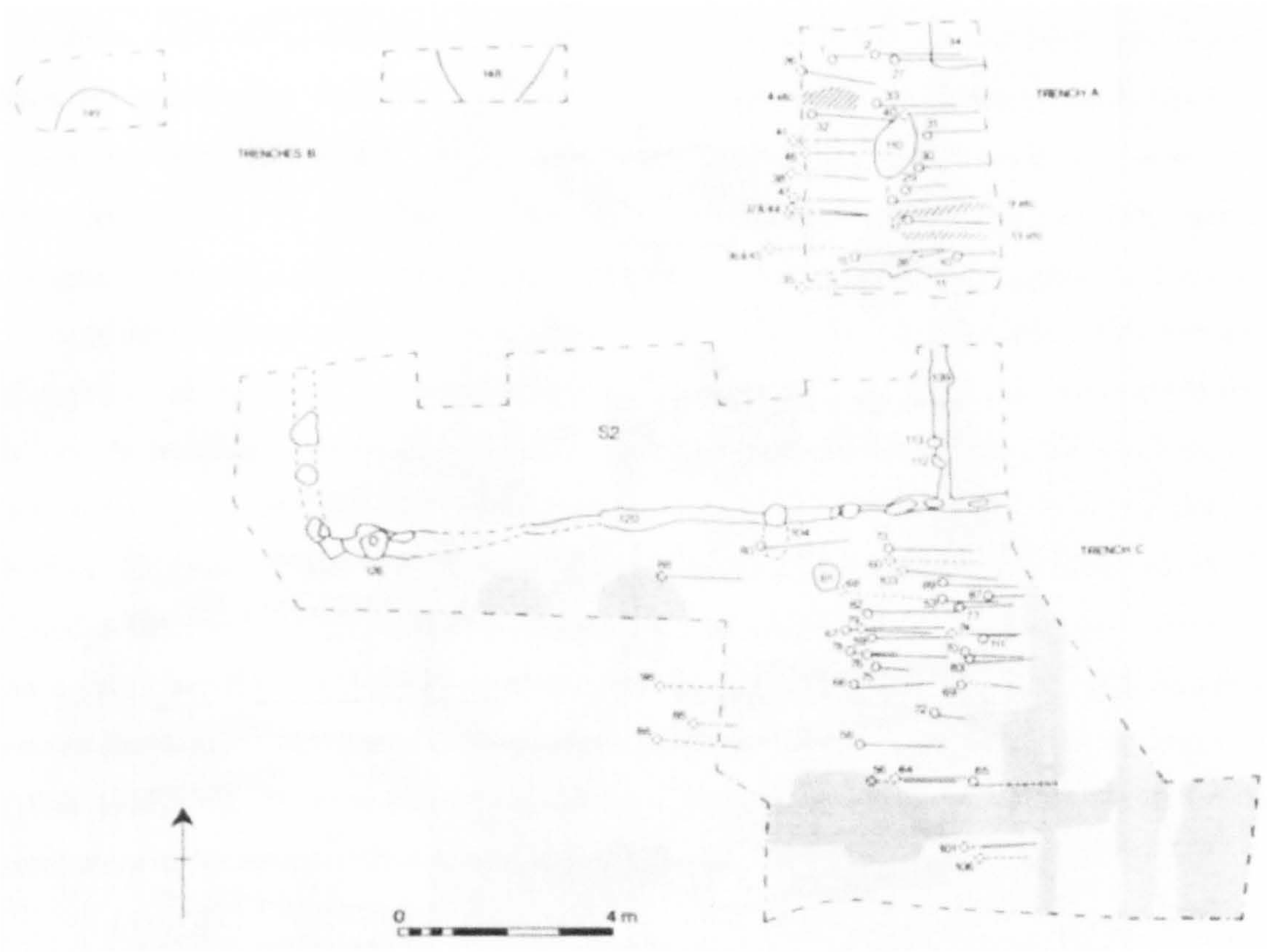
[25] Five burials from this cemetery were dated as part of programme of radiocarbon dating obtained during the course of this study, see chapter six for more information

Figure 4.21. Plan of the early eighth-century cemetery at Cook Street, Hamwic (Ha).
Graves and penannular ditches are in black.



(From Garner 2001:176)

Figure 4.22. Plan of eighth- to ninth-century cemetery at SOU 13 in Hamwic (Ha) illustrating the high density of burial



(from Morton 1992a:123)

the living and the dead in direct competition for space, and this was a competition which the living were always going to win. The restricted space for burial meant that cemeteries, such as SOU 13, rapidly exceeded their capacity (Morton 1992b:75), resulting in the reworking of existing rows of burials causing substantial post-burial disturbance to allow the addition of later burials *(ibid.: 74)*.

As has been illustrated above, the late Saxon period saw the increasing restriction of the available space for burial, yet this alone does not create higher levels of post-burial disturbance. Space only becomes an issue when the number of bodies exceeds the capacity of the cemetery. Even allowing for variations in the amount of the cemetery excavated, it is noticeable that the majority of the larger cemeteries listed in table 4.12 are of late Saxon date and these later sites are characterised by higher levels of post-burial disturbance. This raises two issues: are the chronological differences in post-burial disturbance seen among the dataset real or a function of the number of burials within a cemetery; and why are the later cemeteries, in general, larger? It could be argued that the lower level of disturbance seen in the earlier cemeteries was entirely due to the small number of burials they contained. However, it should be noted that at least one early site, Bevis Grave (Ha), has more burials than the highly disturbed site of SOU 13 (Ha) and, while exhibiting higher levels of disturbance than seen in many of the other earlier cemeteries, this is markedly lower than that seen at SOU 13. In addition, there is no evidence for any boundaries at Bevis Grave. Instead, the burials seem to sprawl along the ditch of the Neolithic long barrow, tapering off towards the periphery of the cemetery (Rudkin 2001:16). This suggests that higher levels of disturbance are not directly correlated with the number of burials, but rather with the number of burials combined with limitations on the space available for burial. The late Saxon period saw not only the restriction of burial ground size, but also an increase in the number of burials. This was, in part, the result of urbanisation and the higher concentration of people found in late Saxon urban centres. In addition, not all churches had associated cemeteries, as the right of burial was the preserve of the minister churches, albeit an increasingly contested one as the number of lay foundations mushroomed in the late tenth and eleventh centuries (Blair 1988b:50). These restrictions on burial rights had the effect of centralising burial in rural areas at the minister church, which also increased the numbers of burials at the site.

The evidence, discussed above, indicates that the markedly higher levels of post-burial disturbance associated with churchyard burial were, at least in part, the result of policies pursued by the Church, both by the enclosing of burial grounds and by restricting burial

rights to certain churches. Initially, these policies had little effect on the levels of post-burial disturbance as churchyard burial was the preserve of ecclesiastics and those of high status. However, as churchyard burial became more universal, the combination of increasing numbers of bodies and a restricted amount of space for burial resulted in escalating levels of post-burial disturbance. However, the Church was not the only factor, particularly in urban centres, where the pressure on space served to constrain cemetery size. The space available for burial in the earliest urban centres, such as Hamwic, was restricted due to competition long before the Anglo-Saxon Church was in a position to dictate the burial mores of the population of Wessex.

It is perhaps paradoxical that the very Church, whose policies in part caused an increase in the level of post-burial disturbance, was one with a belief in bodily resurrection (Bynum 1995:10). The picture painted in Aelfric's Homilies, which date to the late tenth century, is one of the transformation of the body of the deceased on the Day of Judgement, with the surviving mortal remains playing an integral part of the process (Thompson 2002:237). As such, an important issue was whether the disturbance or destruction of the body after burial would prevent an individual's resurrection. Early medieval thought on the subject was heavily influenced by the fifth-century writings of Augustine of Hippo (Bynum 1995:95,113). In *The City of God against the Pagans* he assures his readers that "Even if the body has been completely ground to powder in some dreadful accident, or by the ferocity of enemies; even if it has been so entirely scattered to the winds or into the water that there is nothing left of it", this would not prevent its corporeal resurrection (*De Civitate Dei.I XXII, xxi.* – Dyson 1998:1152).

Two centuries later, Augustine's ideas were echoed in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* which stated that 'He who created man as yet unborn from nothing at all will not find it difficult to replace any lost portions' on the Day of Judgement (*HF* XIII.xiii – Thorpe 1974:562). In his Easter Day Sermon the Anglo-Saxon Blickling Homilist, writing c. AD 1000, painted a similarly reassuring picture for the concerned. On the Day of Judgement, the dead would arise from their graves and "go forth in judgement in such a fashion as they had previously adorned themselves", even if their bodies had been 'eaten by wild animals, or carried off by birds, or torn by fishes' (Swanton 1975:69). In contrast, concern was expressed over disturbing the dead at a number of ecclesiastical councils, such as the sixth-century Council of Mâcon, which decreed that bodies should not normally be displaced to make space for later burials (Morton 1992b:77). However, it was Augustine's view that the

dispersed body would be reconstituted on the Day of Judgement that appeared in the homilies and sermons in late Saxon England.

It is unclear whether the population of late Saxon Wessex were overly concerned with the nuances of eschatology, but they would have been well aware of the high levels of post-burial disturbance seen in many late Saxon churchyards. The unknown author of a late Anglo-Saxon homily wrote about "when a grave is dug in a minster and bones turn up" in the knowledge that this scenario would be all too familiar to his audience (Thompson 2004:102). As such, they may have been concerned about the possible implications that this treatment of the dead had for their resurrection. The Church's reassurances that, regardless of the level of fragmentation, a body would eventually be restored may have assuaged such fears, and it may be that armed with such guarantees, provided the remains of the deceased lay in consecrated ground, for many it ceased to matter how scattered they were.

4.6. Conclusion: The treatment of and attitudes to the dead in early medieval Wessex

Much of the evidence discussed above suggests that the treatment of the body within a funerary context changed during the early medieval period. During the seventh century, there was a great deal of variation in the way the body was laid to rest, such as the use of different body positions, varying grave alignments or whether an individual was cremated or inhumed would have been used to convey information within the funerary arena. By end of the eighth century, this had changed markedly with much greater uniformity seen in the deposition of the dead, with the vast majority of the population being buried in a supine extended position and aligned with their head to the west, with cremation becoming virtually non-existent. This increasing homogeneity in the treatment of the body within later Saxon funerary contexts implies that variants in some aspects of funerary practice, such as cremation burial or body position, had ceased to be an important medium to convey information within mortuary rites. However, it is possible that the very uniformity seen in the deposition of late Saxon burials does send a signal. Perhaps a supine extended inhumation burial, orientated with the head to the west, indicated that an individual had been accorded the funerary rites deemed appropriate by later Saxon society. Moreover, although there is little evidence that the adoption of supine extended west–east inhumation was a direct result of the policies of the Church, it seems likely that this particular method of interring the deceased rapidly became equated with Christian burial.

The changes seen in the treatment of the body may also be a reflection of changes in the focus of funerary rites. The nature of early Saxon funerary rites suggest that the stage provided by the body displayed within an open grave or the spectacle of the cremation pyre provided important venues for the signalling of information, the renegotiation of social relationships and as a means for dealing with loss. The evidence from the later Saxon period, particularly the increasing trend toward removing the body from view, either wrapped in a shroud or encased within a coffin, suggest that the focus of the funerary rites may have moved away from the body. Perhaps even to some extent away from the grave, with the rituals of the church, such as masses for the dead, funerary processions and praying for the soul of the deceased (Paxton 1990), becoming more prominent. Furthermore, the emphasis of the Church on the pastoral care of the soul may have been accompanied by shifting attitudes towards the deceased, changing from fear of the dead to an increasing concern with their fate in the afterlife (*ibid.*:20). This increasing emphasis on the soul of the deceased, as opposed the physical remains of an individual, may in part explain the increasing levels of post-burial disturbance of the deceased seen in late Saxon Wessex was accepted by the general population.

This changing attitude to the dead and their role within mortuary rites during the early medieval period should be seen as just part of a major transformation of funerary practices during the latter part of the early medieval period. This transformation - not just confined to the treatment of the body - was accompanied by significant changes in grave furnishing and fittings and the use of above ground markers and these will be examined in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Grave Matters

Having considered the treatment of the body, the focus of the study now moves to the grave, focusing on the fixtures and trappings that are used to adorn, display, encase and conceal the body as it is laid to rest. If the funerary process from deathbed to grave is seen as performing a number of functions - social, economic, emotional and even political - then clearly the presentation of the body is integral to this process. Some parts of this process, such as funerary processions, masses and the display of the body prior to its final deposition are not readily accessible through the archaeological record. Others such as the preparation of the grave, and how the grave was furnished, however, can be examined, at least in part, archaeologically.

The first two sections of this chapter are in essence a catalogue. The first surveys variations seen in graves within the study area, including the use of grave linings and structural variations within the grave (table 5.1). The second section examines variation in the way the grave was furnished, including the use of grave goods, coffins, pillow stones and grave coverings (table 5.1). An examination of changes in the elaboration of the grave is important in understanding both the shifting nature of funerary provision during the early medieval period and the impact of the introduction of a new faith. Therefore, having established the nature and range of grave variations and grave furnishings within the study area, the information was then analysed for any chronological and regional variations. In addition as the age and sex of the deceased are known to be important factors in determining the type of funerary provision accorded an individual during the early Saxon period (Stoodley 1999a, 1999c, 2000; Lucy 1998; Härke 1989, 1990, 1992; Brush 1988; Pader 1982), it was felt importance to also examine the role of the sex and age of the deceased in determining funerary provision within the dataset. Finally, the arrival of Christianity and the growing

influence of the church on the changing nature of grave variations and grave furnishings are considered.

5.1. Variations in grave type

The vast majority of burials within the study dataset were interred in plain earth graves, basically a hole in the ground with no surviving adornment. The remaining graves exhibited some type of elaboration, either in the form of grave linings or structural features.

5.1.2. Grave linings

Two hundred and thirty-four graves within the study sample contained some form of grave lining (figure 5.1), with the majority having some form of stone lining.

5.1.2.1. Stone-lined graves

The arrangement of stones lining the grave was highly variable and, as such, for the purposes of this study, the stone arrangements within a funerary context were assigned to one of the six categories listed in table 5.2. One hundred and forty-five graves with some form of stone lining (6.5% of graves in the total study sample) were identified in 21 cemeteries where they accounted for between 0.9% and 80% of burials (table 5.3.). At nine sites, stone-lined graves account for less than 10% of all burials, with these sites often having only a couple of stone-lined graves. In contrast, very high levels of stone-lined graves were observed at several sites. In some cases, the high percentage of stone-lined burials at sites, such as Stoneage Barton (So) and Hicknall Slait (So), must be viewed with some caution as the number of burials excavated from these cemeteries is small. However, high levels of stone-lined graves are also seen at sites with greater numbers of burials, including Ulwell where 47.3% of the cemetery's 55 burials were stone lined. The marked variation seen in the levels of stone-lined graves between sites may in part be linked to the availability of raw materials as the majority of linings used local stone. The prevalence of different types of stone linings within the study sample as a whole is given in figure 5.2., and the incidence of each type of stone lining by cemetery is listed in table 5.3. There were sixteen burials containing stone where there was insufficient information available to place them in any of the other categories used in this analysis and these were classified as "possible".

Table 5.1. Grave variations and grave furnishings identified within the study dataset.

Grave variations	Grave linings	Stone (including stone grave covers) Charcoal Others – Sand Mortar Gravel Dark Earth
	Grave structures	Ledges Head recesses
Grave furnishings	Grave goods	-
	Coffins	Wooden (including wooden linings) Lead Stone
	Pillow stones	-
	Grave covers	Stone Others –Dark earth Chalk

Figure 5.1. Frequency of different grave linings within the study dataset.

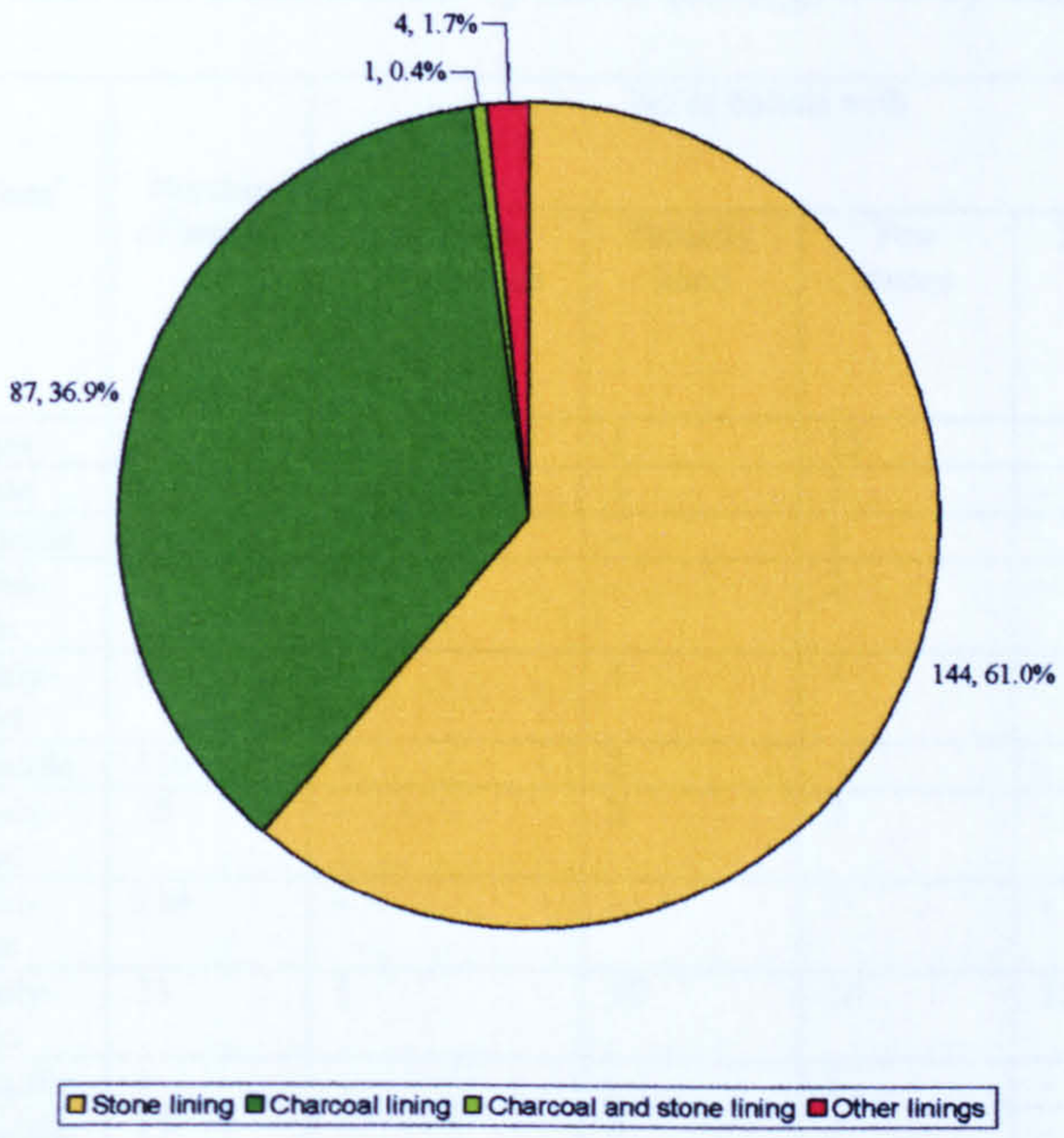


Table 5.2. Categories used in analysing stone-lined graves in early medieval burials.

Category	Description
Few stones	Few stones placed around the sides of the grave
Partial lining	Part of grave lined with stone, ranging from half of a side up to three sides
Complete lining	All four sides of grave lined by stone, category includes stone cist & monolithic stone coffins.
Possible	Stone present, but insufficient information to assign burial to any of the categories above
None	No stones present
Unknown	No information available.

Figure 5.2. Frequency of stone lined graves types

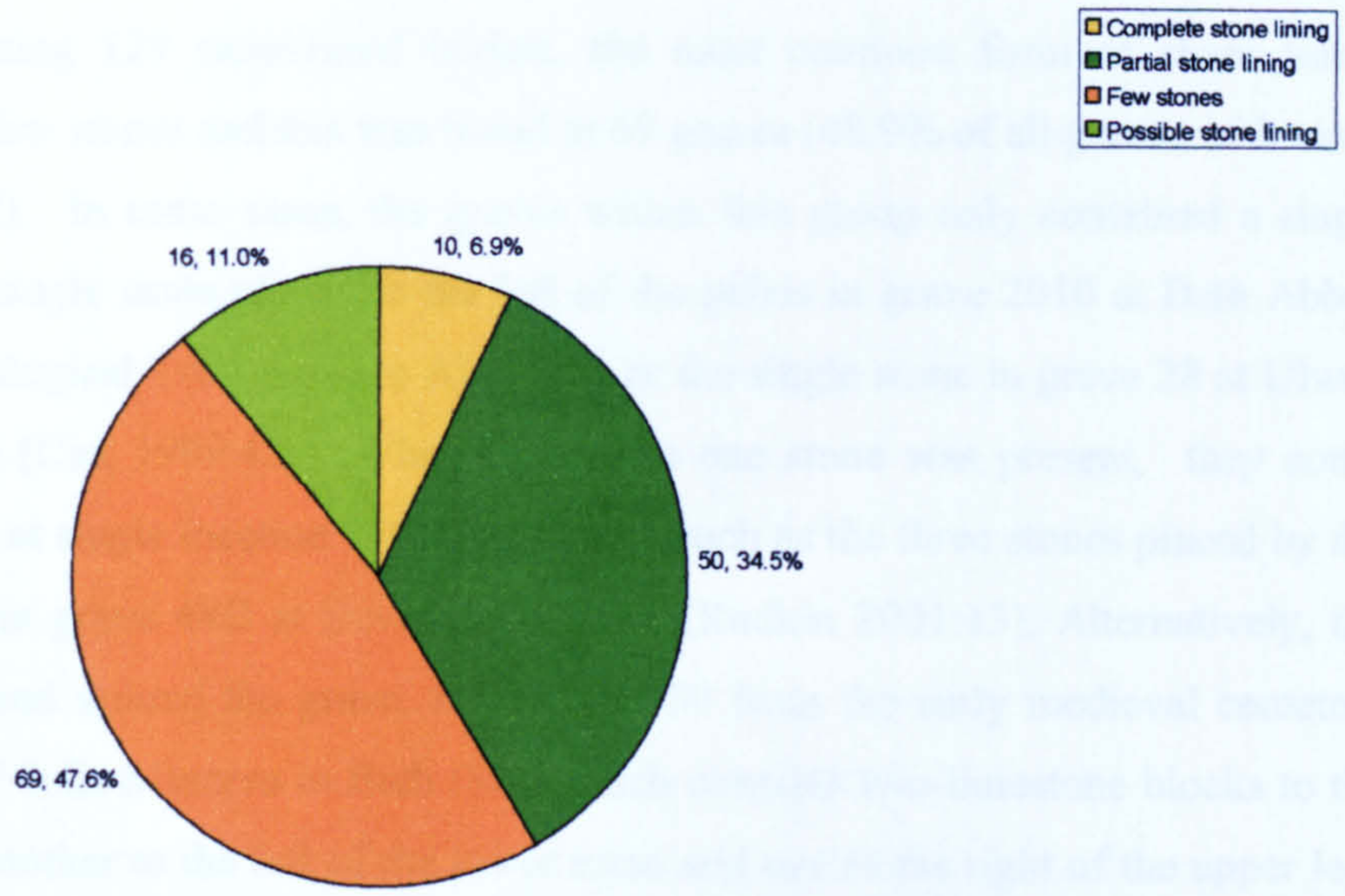


Table 5.3. Distribution of stone lined graves by site.

Site	Date*	Number of burials	No of burials with				% of graves containing stone linings in cemetery
			Complete stone linings	Partially lined	Few stones	Possible stone lining	
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late	105	-	1	15	-	15.2%
Bath Abbey (So)	Late	31	-	1	2	-	9.7%
Beckery Chapel (So)	Middle	58	-	-	1	-	1.7%
Bevis Grave (Ha)	Mid-late	88	-	-	2	-	2.3%
Brean Down (So)	Early-mid	8	-	1	4	-	62.5%
Camerton (So)	Middle	116	1	2	-	-	2.6%
Cannington (So)	Early-mid	55	-	3	3	-	10.9%
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Mid-late	114	-	-	1	-	0.9%
Henley Wood (So)	Early-mid	73	1	10	10	15	49.3%
Hicknall Slait (So)	Middle	4	-	-	1	-	25.5%
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	Middle	15	-	4	1	-	33.3%
Portsdown II (Ha)	Middle	21	-	-	4	-	19.0%
Romsey Abbey (Ha)	Late	31	-	1	-	-	3.2%
Stoneage Barton (So)	Middle	5	-	2	1	1	80.0%
Temple of Sulis Minerva (So)	Late	15	-	-	1	-	6.7%
Tollpuddle Ball (Do)	Early-mid	48	-	1	2	-	6.3%
Trowbridge (Wi)	Late	164	-	2	5	-	4.3%
Ulwell (Do)	Middle	55	2	18	6	-	47.3%
Wells Cathedral (So)	Mid-Late	242	2	3	2	-	2.9%
Winnall II	Middle	47	4		-		10.6%
Wembdon Hill (So)	Middle	13	-	1	3	-	53.8%
Total no. of burials			10	50	69	16	-
% of grave containing stones			7.1%	35.4%	29.1%	11.4%	-

* Chronological categories used in this table are Early-Middle Saxon (Early-mid), Middle Saxon (Middle), Middle-late Saxon (Mid-late) and Late Saxon (late)

Among the remaining 129 stone-lined burials, the most common form of stone lining consisted of just a few stones and this was found in 69 graves (48.9% of all graves with stone linings) (figure 5.2). In some cases, the graves within this group only contained a single stone, such as the single stone placed to the left of the pelvis in grave 2010 at Bath Abbey (So) (Bath Archaeological Trust Archive AHC 93), or the single stone in grave 28 at Ulwell (Do) (figure 5.3A) (Cox 1989:43). When more than one stone was present, they could either be clustered at single location within the grave, such as the three stones placed by the skeleton's left leg in grave 48B at Bevis Grave (Ha) (Rudkin 2001:13). Alternatively, the stones could scattered around the grave, as in grave 39 from the early medieval cemetery over the Temple of Sulis Minerva in Bath (So), which contains two limestone blocks to the right of the skull, another to the left of the lower torso and one to the right of the upper legs (Roman Baths Museum Archive BATRN 1986.1112-101, 116-105). Although there was considerable variation in the position of the stones in the grave within this category, the most common locations were around the head, as in grave 4 at Hicknall Slait (So) where three stones were placed in the west end of the grave (Taylor 1967:68) and the feet, with for example three graves from Portdown II (Ha) having either one or two flints placed by the feet of the skeleton (Corney 1967:24-25).

When there are only a few stones within the grave, it is sometimes difficult to determine if the inclusion of the stones within the grave was even the result of deliberate human activity. In some cases, the few stones lining a grave could be the result of the chance placement of stones unearthed when digging the grave. Such stones may not necessarily have been removed but left in situ within the grave (Stoodley 1999a:61). Alternatively, they may have been deposited on the floor of the grave or thrown back into the grave as part of the backfill. Any of these scenarios could produce a "stone lining" by chance as opposed to deliberate human activity. Often it can be impossible to tell, although in some cases, such as three stones in the wall at the foot of grave 110 at Ulwell, some human involvement seems more likely than others where a few stones are found randomly scattered around all sides of the grave.

Fifty graves (35.5% of graves with stone linings) had partial stone linings (figure 5.2), such as in grave 43 from Ulwell (figure 5.3B) and in grave 212 from Wells Cathedral (So) (figure 5.5A). The extent to which the graves were lined varied considerably. At one extreme, only part of one side of the grave might be lined as in grave 103 at Ulwell, which only had stone lining along the east end of the south side of the grave. At the other end of the spectrum, three sides of the grave might be lined as in grave 39 also at Ulwell (Dorset County Museum

Figure 5.3. Examples of burials from the seventh-century cemetery at Ulwell with A) a few stones (Grave 28) (upper burial) and (B) partial stone lining(Grave 43) (lower burial).
(from Cox 1989:43)

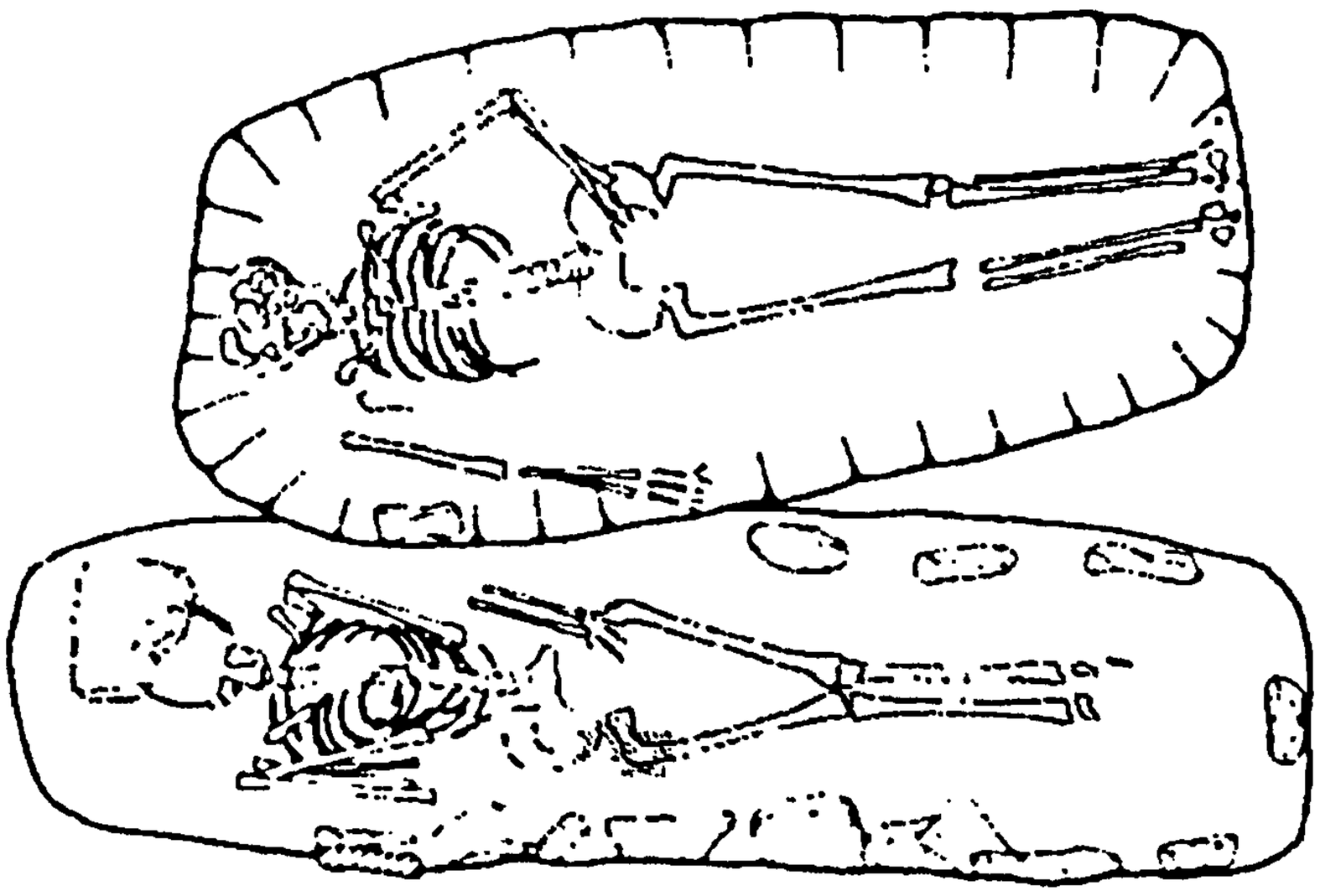


Figure 5.4. Cist type grave from grave 21 from the seventh-century cemetery at Ulwell (Do).
(from Cox 1989:43)

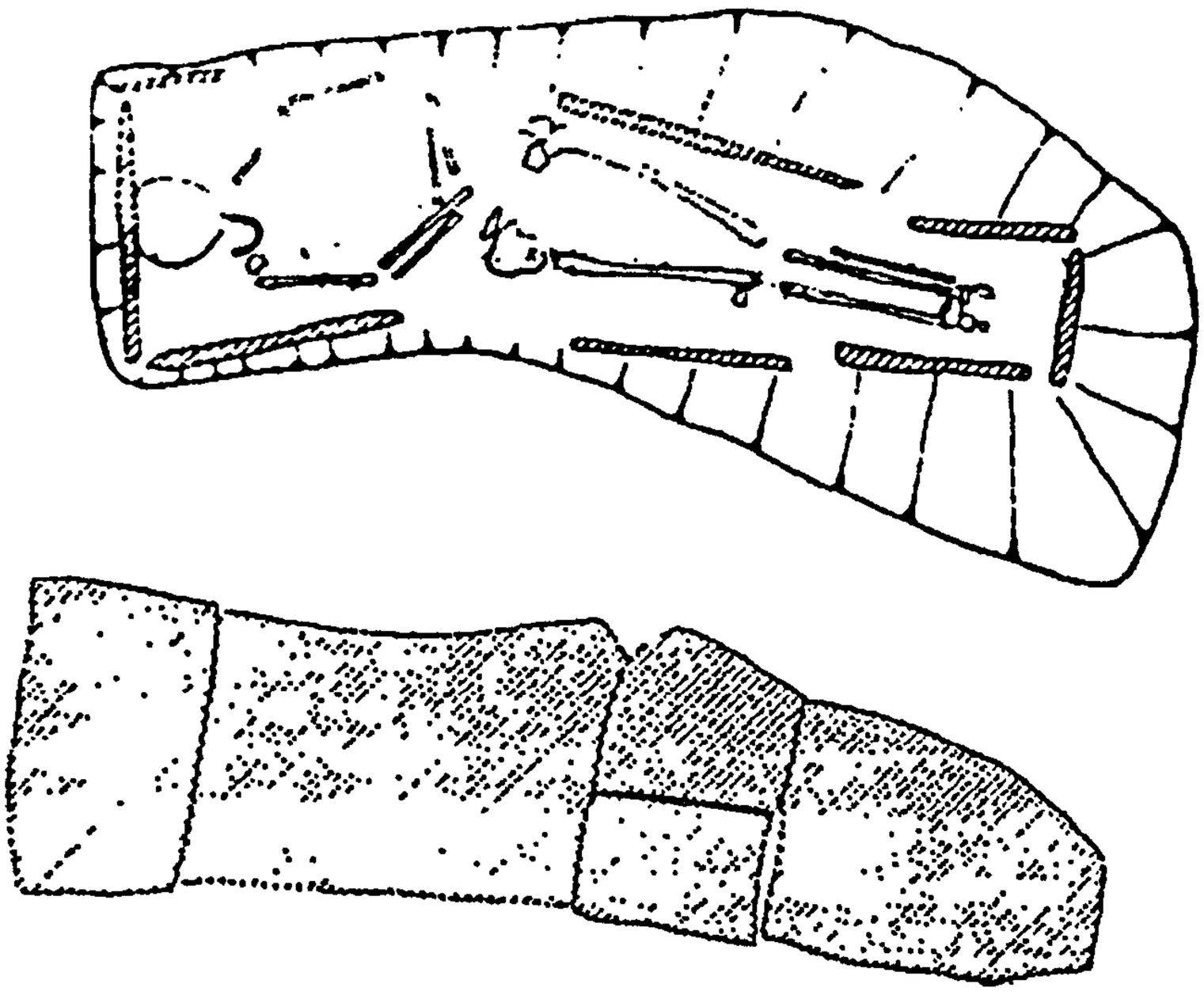


Figure 5.5.(A) A partial stone lining in grave 212 from the cemetery at Wells Cathedral (So). (B) The stone cist containing burial 72 at Wells Cathedral (So).
(from Rodwell 2001:109)

A.

B.

Archive 1992.52.8.1). Stones might even be present on all four sides but with breaks in the lining as in grave 14 at Henley Wood (So) (Watts & Leach 1996 Microfiche 627). As with the previous category, there was considerable variation in the position of the stones within the grave, but the lining of the two long sides of the grave, with in some cases a third side also being lined, was an arrangement seen in a number of burials, including graves 1 and 5 from Stoneage Barton (So) (Webster & Brunning, forthcoming), while a stone lining at just the head and foot of the grave, as in grave 61 at Ulwell (Do) (Dorset County Museum Archive 1992.52.8.1), was also seen in a few burials.

Only six graves (0.3% of the study sample) were completely stone-lined. Five of the graves were lined by stone or limestone slabs. The quality seen in the shaping and finish of the stone used was variable, ranging from the well cut limestone slabs such as those used to construct the cists in graves 21 and 68 at Ulwell (Dorset County Museum Archive 1992.52.8.1) (figure 5.4) to the undressed blocks used to form the tapering cist for burial 13 at Henley Wood (Watts & Leach 1996:57). In one of these graves, burial 72 at Wells Cathedral, the joints were mortared (see figure 5.5B) (Rodwell 2001:110). The sixth grave, grave 11 from Camerton, contained the only example of a monolithic stone coffin in the study sample in the form of a re-used Roman coffin (Horne 1928:65; Geake 1997:144). The stone coffin contained the remains of an adult female (figure 5.6) (Horne 1928:65). The top of the coffin lay just below the surface and it is possible there may have originally been a lid, but that this had been destroyed by ploughing. The coffin is of Romano-British date and appears to have been re-used for a later burial as the body seems to have been forced into a coffin, which was a little too small for it. The re-use of stone coffins does not appear to have been unusual during the early medieval period, and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* contains an account of the re-use of a stone coffin, presumably of Roman date, during the translation of St. Aethelreda (*HE IV.19*–Sherley-Price 1990:237).[1] Furthermore, the practice of re-use does not appear to have been confined to Roman coffins, with contemporary coffins also being reused. A late Saxon *in situ* stone coffin at York Minster (NYk) contained the jumbled remains of four individuals (Phillips & Heywood 1995:82). While the late Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Raunds (Nh) contained at least four individuals that appeared to have been reburied after first being interred in early medieval stone coffins and a skeleton found in one of the stone coffins in the cemetery appears to have been at least its second occupant (Boddington 1996:43).

[1] A stone coffin was, also, used for the burial of Sebbi, King of the East Saxons (HE IV:11 – Sherley-Price 1990:223). It has been suggested that this may also have been a re-used Roman sarcophagus as the body was too small for the coffin and the initial solution to this problem was to look for another coffin (Blair 2005:230 note. 206).

Figure 5.6. The re-used Roman-British stone coffin from Camerton
(courtesy of Somerset County Museum)

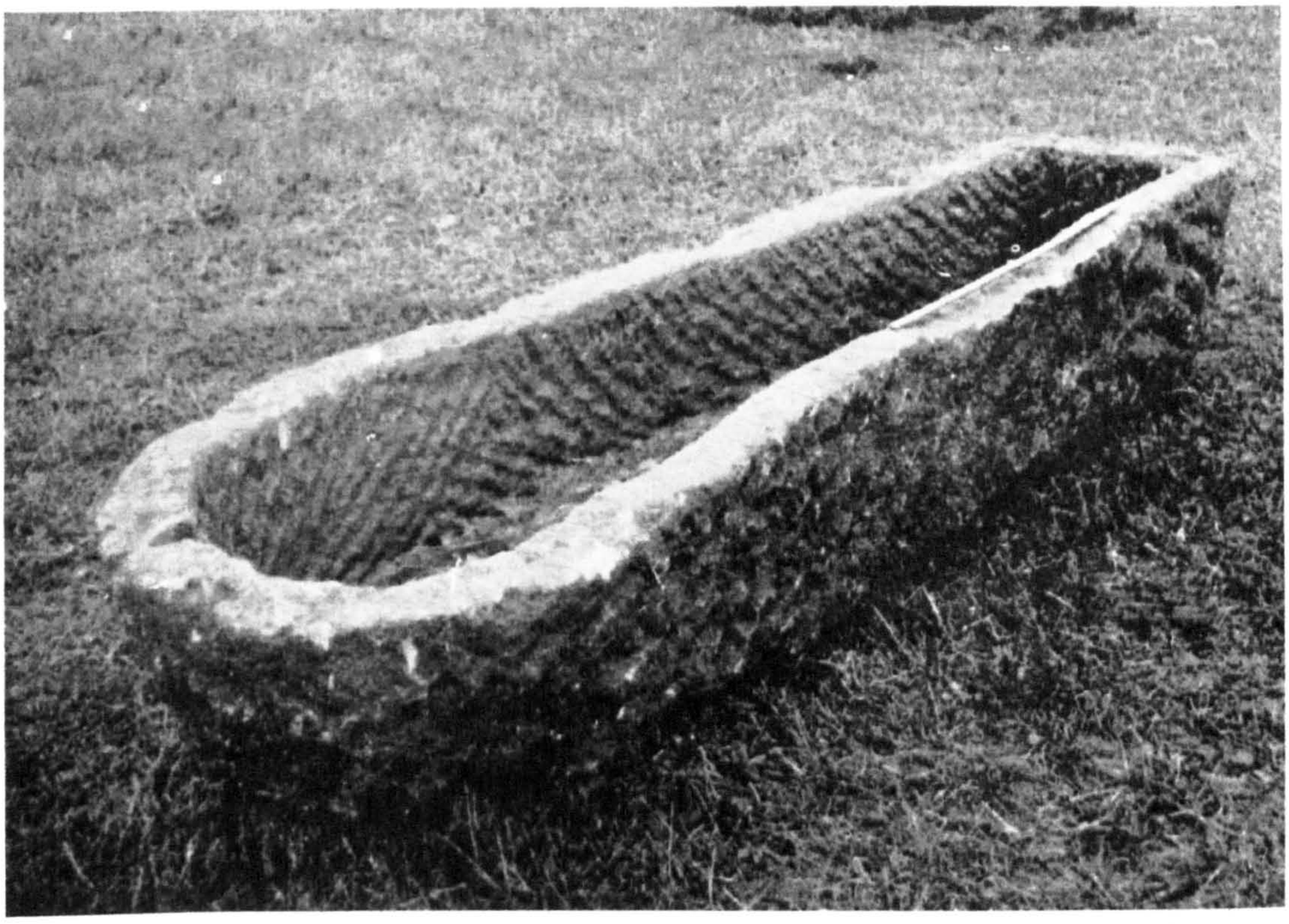
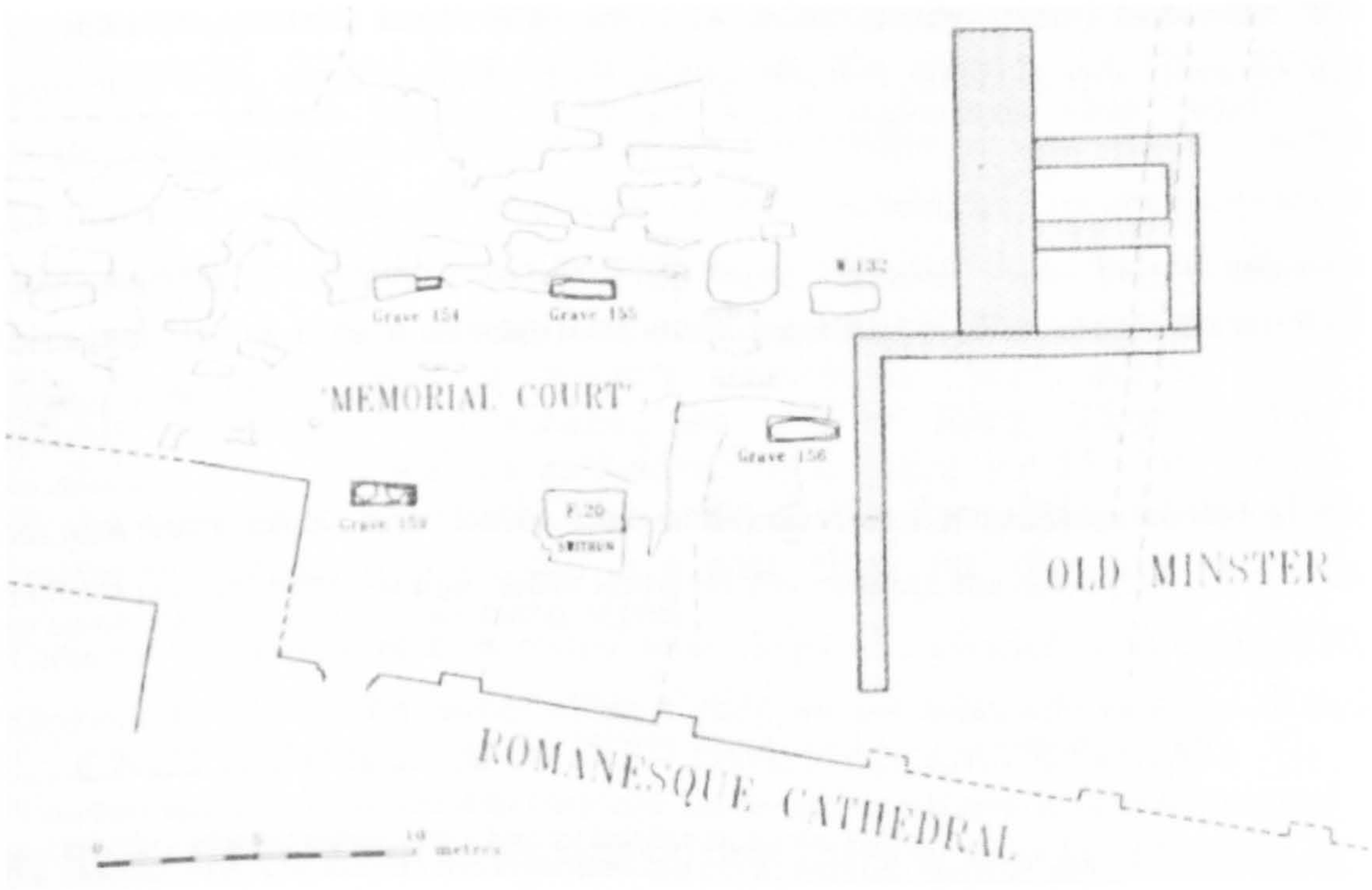


Figure 5.7. Plan of the stone coffins left in situ in the "memorial court" which lay adjacent to the new Norman Cathedral in Winchester.
(from Crook 1994:174)



The monolithic stone coffin at Camerton is the only example within the study dataset, but it is not the only example within the study area as seven stone coffins, presumably of early medieval manufacture, have been recovered from excavations at the Old Minister in Winchester (Ha) (Kjølbye-Biddle, *pers. comm.*).[2] Six of these coffins are known to have lain within the Old Minster's church. One lay at the east end of the nave in the crossing of the original seventh-century church (Biddle 1965b:252; 1969:fig. 6. between pgs. 320 & 321), while the other four lay in the western part of the church built in the late tenth century to link the original church with the free standing tower of St. Martin (*ibid.*:321).[3] These last four coffins lay close to the site of St. Swithin's original grave. A highly prestigious location as their occupants could reap the advantages of being buried *ad sanctum* (Crook 1994:173).

Monolithic stone coffins represent a significant expenditure on funerary provision and their use is likely to have been limited to those with sufficient resources, namely the upper echelons of religious and lay society (Biddle 1969:321). The high status of those interred in stone coffins at Winchester can also be seen in their burial in highly desirable and prestigious locations within the Old Minster. Indeed, the occupants of the stone coffins at the Old Minster appear to have been of sufficient importance for them to have been left *in situ* after the demolition of the Old Minster in 1093-4 (*ibid.*:174). The stone coffins around St. Swithun's grave became part of the "memorial court" lying along the north side of the New Norman cathedral (figure 5.7), with the stone coffins protruding above the pink plaster surface (Biddle 1968:278). Given the expense, it is not surprising that there are so few examples of monolithic stone coffins within the study area. However, it is possible there were more stone coffins within the study area, but that they did not survive. Given the high levels of disturbance seen in many churchyards, it is possible that some stone coffins may have been disturbed, destroyed or recycled, with the stone being used for other purposes. In addition, many stone coffins would have lain within Anglo-Saxon churches and may have been destroyed when these churches were either demolished or refurbished in the medieval or post-medieval periods.

As with the monolithic stone coffins, some of the other forms of complete stone linings also indicate the expenditure of time and/or resources. For example, the cist in grave 72 at Wells Cathedral was constructed from dressed stone blocks with mortared joints (figure 5.5B) (Rodwell 2001:110). Yet, stones within a grave are not necessarily indicative of high

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[2] The final report of the excavations at the Old Minster and New Minster at Winchester has yet to be published and the information and numbers given here are based on the interim reports.
[3] A robbed pit likely to have held a fifth stone coffin was found close to the four stone coffins in the western part of the church (Biddle 1966:270).

expenditure (Thompson 2004:122). The vast majority of graves are lined using local stone – such as limestone in Dorset and sandstone in parts of Somerset. In addition, given that many graves are partially lined or only contain a few stones, all the stone used may in some cases have been obtained during the excavation of the grave (Boddington 1996:38).

The variation seen in the numbers, type and location of stones within early medieval graves makes it unlikely that any single factor would explain their presence. Stones within a grave, in whatever form, seem most likely to provide support and protection (Boddington 1996:38). The complete stone linings and monolithic stone coffins clearly serve to enclose and protect the body of the deceased, while partially lined graves may have been designed to protect parts of the body, particularly the head and torso (Thompson 2004:123). Stone may have also supported the grave itself. It has been suggested that the grave linings were used to stabilise the sides of the grave, yet many linings are only partial and rarely reach as high as the surface (Watts & Leach 1996:57, Mf740). However, stones, even in small numbers, could possibly have been used to support wooden coffin linings. Grave 257 at Wells Cathedral contains a pile of stones at its east end and evidence for charred boards along its north and south sides and it is possible that the stones were used to keep the side planks wedged apart (Rodwell 2001:70). Furthermore, evidence from a number of graves at Wells Cathedral suggests the presence of wooden covers over the body (*ibid.*:71) and it is possible that this type of cover could potentially be supported by stones lining the side of the grave, particularly if the long sides of the grave were both lined (Boddington 1996:40). Alternatively, in some cases, as with the ten stone lined graves containing evidence for wooden linings/coffins from Barnstaple Castle, it seems likely that the stone grave linings were produced by placing stones between the coffin and the edge of the grave (Miles 1986b:66), perhaps to wedge the coffin into place (Philpott 1991:65). Ultimately, the use of stones probably should be seen as serving a number of different functions, which were highly variable, both between and within cemeteries.

5.1.2.3. Charcoal burials

The second most common material used to line graves within the study area was charcoal. For the purposes of this analysis, charcoal linings, or charcoal burials, were defined by the presence of a layer of charcoal covering the base of the grave (figures 5.8 & 5.9). Graves

Figure 5.8. Charcoal burials in graves 546 (above) and 542 (below) from the ninth- to eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens (Ha)
(©Winchester Museums Service)

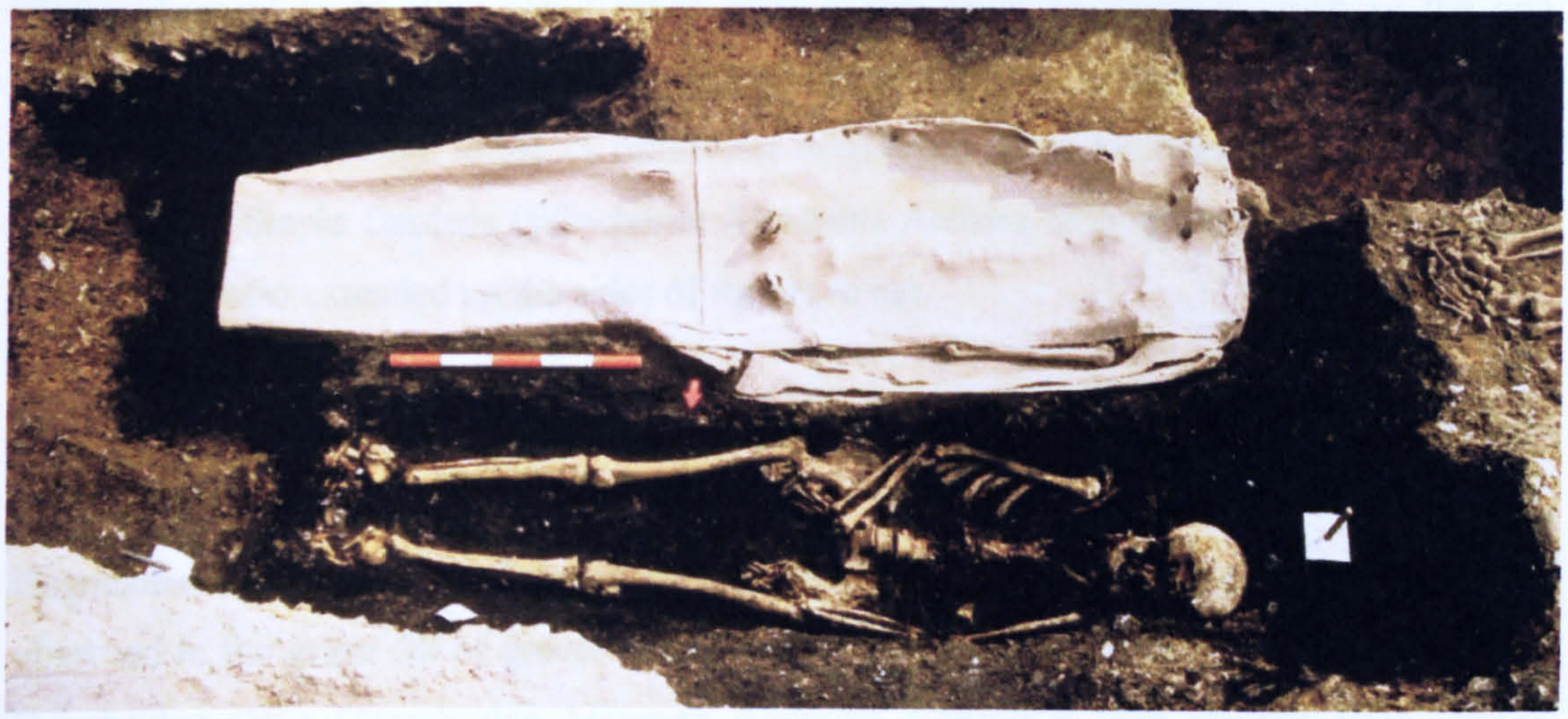


Figure 5.9. Section of charcoal burial in grave 526 from the ninth-eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens (Ha)
(©Winchester Museums Service)

containing isolated patches, smears or lines[4] of charcoal were excluded, as were those with charcoal in just the grave fill. Eighty-seven charcoal burials were identified within the study sample. The charcoal burials within the sample exhibited considerable variation in the depth of the charcoal layer. This could range from a thin layer of charcoal, such as the one centimetre layer seen in the base of grave 723 at Bath Abbey (Bath Archaeological Trust archive AHC93), through to the 15 centimetre deep layer which lay below the lead coffin in grave 546 at Staple Gardens (Winchester Museums Archive SG89). In this latter example, the charcoal also extended up the sides of the grave cut.

A number of the burials from Exeter Cathedral also had a sprinkling of charcoal above the body (Exeter Cathedral Excavations Archive). It is possible this may represent the fragmented remains of some form of wooden container. However, charcoal flecks have been observed in the grave fill of graves from a number of sites within the study area, including Trowbridge (Wi) (Trowbridge Museum Archive), Camerton (So) (Horne 1928, 1932), Wembdon Hill (So) (Woods undated), and Barnstaple Castle (Dv) (Miles 1986b:66). Often in these instances, the quantity of charcoal was relatively small and it is difficult to determine if it represents a deliberate inclusion on the part of the mourners or whether it was an accidental incorporation. At Camerton (So) where charcoal was found in some form in almost 40% of all graves, it seems likely that the sprinkling of charcoal over the body, particularly in the area of the head and upper torso, was part of the community's funerary practices (Horne 1933:46-7). This may also have been the case at Exeter Cathedral. The analysis of the charcoal from burials at Winchester Old Minister and Exeter Cathedral indicated that it was derived from oak (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:229; Gale 1998). Similar findings were seen in the analysis of charcoal burials from St. Oswalds in Gloucester (Heighway & Bryant 1999:202) and Castle Green, Hereford, although the latter site produced at least one grave containing traces of A*cer sp*, possibly maple (Shoesmith 1980:39).

The charcoal burials were found in only seven cemeteries, where, excluding the isolate from Cathedral Close, they accounted for between 0.6 and 53.5% of burials (table 5.4.). Charcoal burials were also found at the Old and New Minsters in Winchester, where they represented 10% and 39.3% respectively of all excavated graves (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:229). Any interpretation of the variation seen in the numbers of charcoal can only at best be tentative as there are a number of factors that can distort their frequency. None of the seven cemeteries in table 5.6. has been fully excavated. In some cases, such as at Bath and Romsey Abbey, the

[4] Thin lines or smears of charcoal around the body may represent the remains of charred timbers in the grave and these burials are considered with the evidence for the presence of wooden or coffins in section 5.2.2.

Table 5.4. Distribution of charcoal burials by site

Site	Date	Total no. of charcoal burials	% of cemetery population
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	3	2.9%
Bath Abbey (So) – Abbey Heritage Excavations	Late Saxon	9[i]	29.0%
Bath Abbey (So) – Kingston Parade.	Late Saxon	1	100%
Cathedral Close (Ha)	Late Saxon	1	100%
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Mid-late Saxon	61	53.5%
Romsey Abbey (Ha)	7th-11th century	4	12.9%
Staple Gardens (Ha)	9th-11th century	7	2.4%
Trowbridge (Wi)	10th-12th century	1	0.6%
Total		86	4.1%

Table 5.5. Graves lined with other materials identified in the study dataset.

Site	Date	Grave No.	Type of lining	Location	Sex of occupant	Age of occupant
St. Mary's Stadium (Ha)	8th-9th century	7383	Gravel	Floor of grave	Female	Young Adult
Wells Cathedral (So)	Middle-late Saxon	100	Mortar	Floor of grave	Male	Old Adult
		152	Mortar	Sides of grave	Male	Mature Adult
		162	Mortar	Floor of grave	Unknown	Adult

Table 5.6. Graves with head recesses identified within the study dataset.

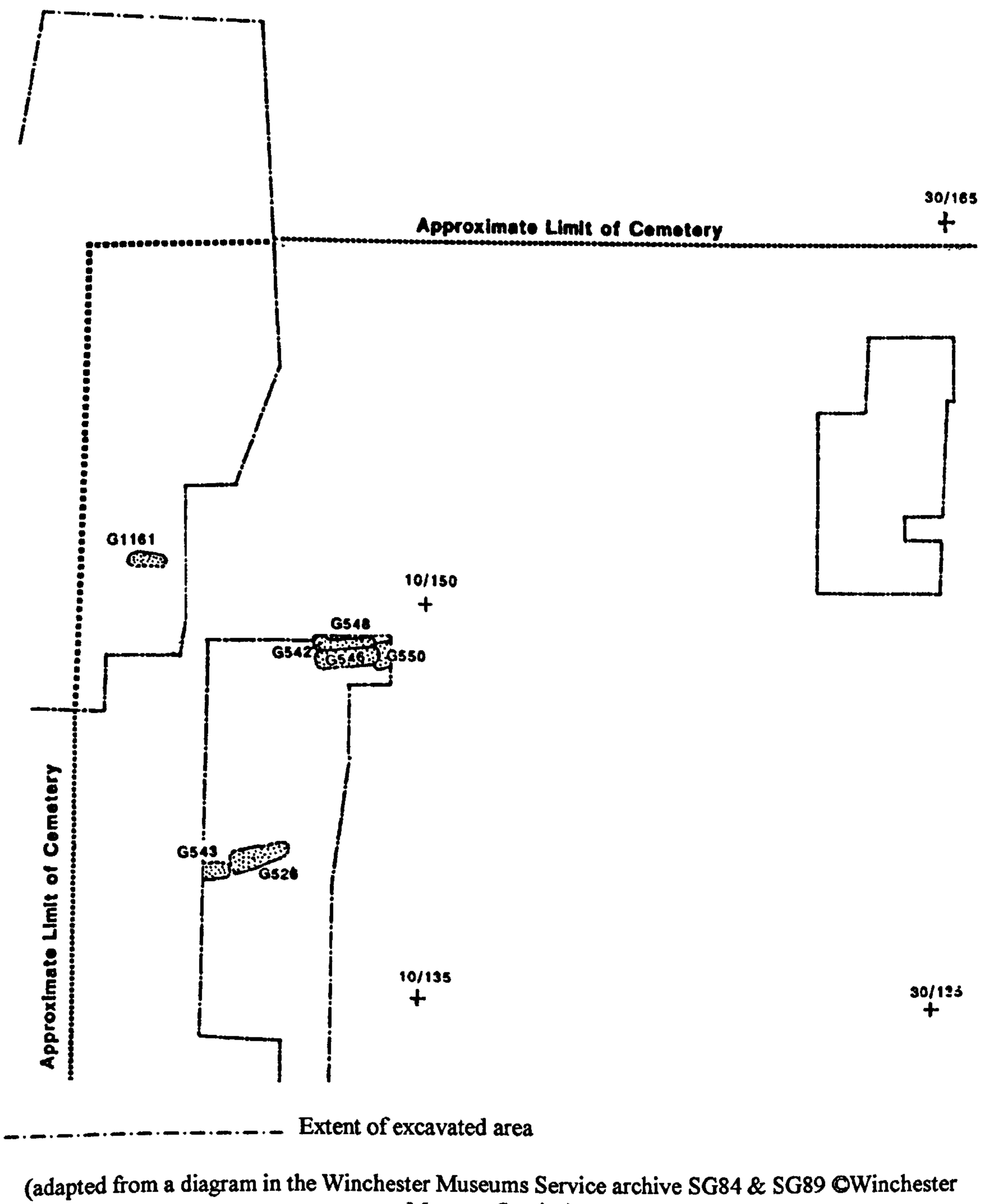
Site	Date	Grave number	Sex of burial	Age of burial	Rock-cut grave	Lined grave	Grave cover
Trowbridge	c.950-1139AD	2049	Male	Young adult	Yes	No	No
Wells Cathedral	Middle-late Saxon	72	Female	Adult	No	Stone cist	Stone grave cover
		100	Male	Old adult	No	Mortar floor	No
		113	Female	Young adult	Unknown	No	No
		135	Male	Old adult	No	No	No
		150	Male?	Mature adult	Yes	No	No
		152	Male	Mature adult	No	Sides of grave lined with mortar	Stone grave cover
		212	Female	Mature adult	No	Complete stone lining	No

[i] Number of charcoal burials based on archive (Bath Archaeological Trust Archive AHC 93) and not on published sources.

actual excavated area is small and unlikely to be representative of the cemetery as a whole. In these situations, a few charcoal burials among a small number of graves can artificially inflate their incidence, producing unnaturally high levels. For example, only a single burial from the Cathedral Close site can be securely dated to the early medieval period and it is a charcoal burial. Thus the incidence of charcoal burials at this site is 100%. The incidence of charcoal burials can also be affected by the area of cemetery excavated as they are not uniformly distributed within a cemetery. Four of the seven charcoal burials from Staple Gardens lie in a single cluster (figure 5.10), while six of the nine charcoal burials from Bath Abbey (Abbey Heritage centre excavations) lie in two clusters (Bath Archaeological Trust Archive AHC 93). Higher levels of charcoal burials in the immediate vicinity of the church have been noted at a number of sites, such as at St. Oswald, Gloucester where 33 of the 34 charcoal burials lay close to the church (Heighway & Bryant 1999:202). This may account for the high levels of charcoal burial seen at the Winchester's Old and New Minsters as most of the excavated burials were recovered either from within the two churches or the areas immediately adjacent to them. Finally, the exceptionally high proportion of charcoal burials seen at Exeter Cathedral should be viewed with caution. It is likely to have been artificially enhanced as all charcoal burials from the site were assumed to be of early medieval date, while many of the plain earth burials from the site remain unphased (Henderson & Bidwell 1982:156).

Nonetheless, despite all the problems and potential biases discussed above, the data does suggest there may have been significant differences in the the incidence of charcoal burials at some sites. For example the excavated area at Trowbridge is approximately a third of the graveyard and consists of the area to the west of the church, including the western wall of the church, and parts of the cemetery to the south of the church (Graham & Davies 1993:38), yet only one charcoal burial was found among the 148 early medieval burials excavated (Trowbridge Museum Trowbridge Castle Excavation archive). While it is possible that other charcoal burials lie in the unexcavated areas, all the available evidence suggests that charcoal burial was an uncommon funerary rite at Trowbridge. In contrast, the 69 charcoal burials recovered from the Old Minster in Winchester (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:230), admittedly from an excavated population of 755 burials in 743 graves (*ibid.*:227), suggests the practice was more commonplace. Variations in the incidence of charcoal burials may simply reflect differences in local funerary preferences. Yet, it seems likely they may also reflect differences in the composition of communities served by the cemeteries. The use of charcoal, particularly in the large quantities seen in some of the deepest charcoal beds, point to added expenditure of time and resources. A number of charcoal burials at Exeter Cathedral, Bath Abbey and the Old and New Minsters at Winchester contain the remains of iron coffin

Figure 5.10. Distribution of charcoal burials[i] in the ninth-to eleventh-century cemetery at Staple Gardens, Winchester.



(adapted from a diagram in the Winchester Museums Service archive SG84 & SG89 ©Winchester Museum Service)

[i] Diagram only illustrates location of burials with charcoal beds. The location of the three graves containing thin smears of charcoal, possibly the remains of coffins, is not illustrated.

fittings again indicative of more elaborate funerary rites.[5] This evidence for added expenditure, particularly when combined with the high numbers of charcoal burials in prestigious burial locations, such as within and in the immediate vicinity of the church, suggest that charcoal burials tended to be accorded to those of higher lay or ecclesiastical status. This may explain the differences in the incidence of charcoal burials seen in Winchester's Old and New Minsters with their royal and episcopal connections and the rural manorial cemetery at Trowbridge. Finally, the use of other funerary rites that performed a similar function to charcoal burials may have affected the numbers of charcoal burials within a cemetery. The late Saxon cemetery at Wells Cathedral contains no archetypal charcoal burials among its 242 burials. However, lines of charcoal thought to be the remains of charred coffins and planks have been found in a number of graves (Rodwell 2001:69). While there is no way of determining if the charred coffins and planks served a function analogous to that of charcoal burials, the possibility exists (Hadley 2001:99).

Why charcoal specifically was used as an appropriate means to distinguish burials is less clear. While charcoal in the fill might be used as a method to prevent the later disturbance of the burial (*ibid.*:231), such a function is unlikely for charcoal beds placed beneath the body. Charcoal has absorptive properties and may have been used to absorb the products of decay and a means of avoiding unpleasant smells (Shoesmith 1980:49; Richards 2002:164). Perhaps in an era with a belief in bodily resurrection, charcoal was thought to retard the body's corruption (*ibid.*). Yet the position of the lead coffin in grave 546 at Staple Gardens and the depressions left by coffins in the charcoal beds in graves CB 17 and CB 66 at Exeter Cathedral suggests that, at least in some cases, the charcoal lay below and not within the coffin where it would be more effective as an absorbent. As such, it is possible that charcoal within a grave may have had a symbolic, rather than practical, function. Ashes are the ancient symbol of the penitent. During the early medieval period, they were used to anoint the sick and dying as well as the faithful on Ash Wednesday (Thompson 2004:77 & 119). Charcoal is not that dissimilar from ash and it may be possible to draw parallels between ashes and the use of charcoal in the grave (Thompson 2002:240). Possibly, the addition of charcoal to a grave should be seen as a mark of humility and as serving to extend the penitential process into the grave and beyond (*ibid.*; Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:231). Ashes may also have had a protective function with the scattering of ashes serving to protect the soul

[5] The iron coffin fittings from these sites are discussed in more detail in section 5.2.2.

and promote the health of the body (Thompson 2004:121).[6] As such, charcoal within the grave may also have served to protect the corpse (*ibid.*).

5.1.2.4. Other grave linings

Stone and charcoal were not the only material used to line early medieval graves and four graves lined with other materials were identified within the study sample (table 5.5). The base of one grave, 7383 at St. Mary's Stadium II (Ha), was lined with 3cm of gravel (Birbeck & Smith 2003:93). Two adult burials from the cemetery at Wells Cathedral (So), graves 100 and 162, had mortar floors (Rodwell 2001:67; 566). A third burial, grave 152 had a plain earth floor, but its walls were coated with yellow plaster that had been applied directly onto the earthen sides (*ibid.*:65)(figure 5.11).[7] This grave also had a stone grave cover, which had been secured in place over the grave using a mortar similar to that used to coat the sides of that grave (*ibid.*:66-67). Finally, while not within the study sample, three graves lined with yellow/orange sand were found at the Old Minister in Winchester (Ha) (Kjølbye-Biddle 1975:106; 1992:227; *pers. comm.*). In one grave, the lining was a combination of sand and charcoal (Biddle 1969:322).

As with charcoal burials, the lining of these graves suggests that additional effort was made in the preparation of the final resting place of these individuals.[8] The use of contrasting lining material clearly served to separate these burials from others within the cemetery although why these individuals were distinguished in this way is less clear. The plaster and mortar burials at Wells are associated with other forms of grave elaboration, such as head recesses, stone grave covers and charred boards from wooden linings/coffins (Rodwell 2001:65-67), which when combined indicate a level of expenditure of both time and resources on these burials suggestive of status, be it religious, economic or social. Yet in contrast, it is only its lining that sets the gravel grave apart from the others within their cemeteries. It may be that the occasional use of unusual grave linings had a significance to early medieval communities that is no longer easy to discern or it may be in some cases these contrasting linings were added to prevent later disturbance of the burial or simply for aesthetic reasons.

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[6] The tenth-century Claudius Pontifical I's rite for the consecration of a church says "that consecrated ashes may be scattered for the redemption of sinners, the health of the body and the protection of the soul" (Thompson 2004:121).

[7] Examples of a grave with a mortar lining and another with a mortar base were found in the tenth- to sixteenth-century cemetery of St. Helen-on-the-Walls in York (Dawes & Magilton 1980:15 & 17)

[8] Although other forms of grave elaborate such as grave goods, stone linings or pillow stones were not observed in any of the burials. Evidence for coffins/wooden linings in the form of the remains of charred wood were found in both graves with mortar floors at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:67 & 566).

5.1.3. Internal structural features within graves

Structural features in the form of shaped recesses for the head and ledges along the sides of the grave were identified in 24 graves within the study sample.[9] Head recesses were found in eight graves (table 5.6). Seven of the graves were from the Cathedral cemetery at Wells (So) (Rodwell 2001:65 & 110), while the other was from the manorial cemetery at Trowbridge (Wi) (Graham & Davies 1993:41). There was considerable variation seen in the construction of the head recesses in the sample. These ranged from a simple shaped recess for the head in an earth cut grave, such as in grave 135 at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:565) to head niches carved out from the bedrock in rock cut graves, such as grave 150 from Wells Cathedral (*ibid.*:68) and grave 2049 from Trowbridge (Graham & Davies 1993:41).In some cases, the head recess was constructed from the grave's stone lining, such as the relatively crude head recess created from three undressed stones in grave 212 at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:65) or the more elaborate recess formed from dressed stone as part of the stone cist in grave 72 also at Wells (*ibid.*:110). On occasion, additional support for the head was provided by placing stones within the head recess, such as the small stones seen in grave 113 at Wells and the two pieces of stone behind the skull in grave 150 from the same cemetery (*ibid.*:68). The practice of packing stones around the head for support is also found in graves without head recesses and the phenomenon is discussed in more detail in section 5.2.3.

Many of the graves with head recesses also exhibit evidence for added expenditure of either time or resources on funerary provision (table 5.6). The rock-cut graves 150 from Wells and grave 2049 from Trowbridge had been cut 70cm and 25cm in into the bedrock respectively - a far from simple process (*ibid.*:68; Graham & Davies 1993:41). Graves 212 from Wells Cathedral has a complete stone lining, while the burial in grave 72, also from Wells, lies within a stone cist with mortared joints (Rodwell 2001:65 & 110). The graves of two other examples from Wells, graves 152 and 100, were lined with mortar, on the floor and sides of the grave respectively (Rodwell 2001:65& 67). Grave 152 also had a stone cover slab (figure 5.11), while the stone cist containing burial 72 was covered by four slabs of conglomerate (*ibid.*:109). This association with more elaborate graves suggests that head recesses are only present when there is added expenditure on funerary provision, potentially linking this feature to high status burials.

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[9] Structural features within graves are likely to be under-represented as the grave cuts of many of the burials within the study sample were either difficult to discern or destroyed by later burials and/or activities and evidence for ledges and head niches may have been overlooked.

Figure 5.11. Plaster lined grave 152 from the cemetery at Wells Cathedral, with lid on right and with lid removed on left
(from Rodwell 2001:66)

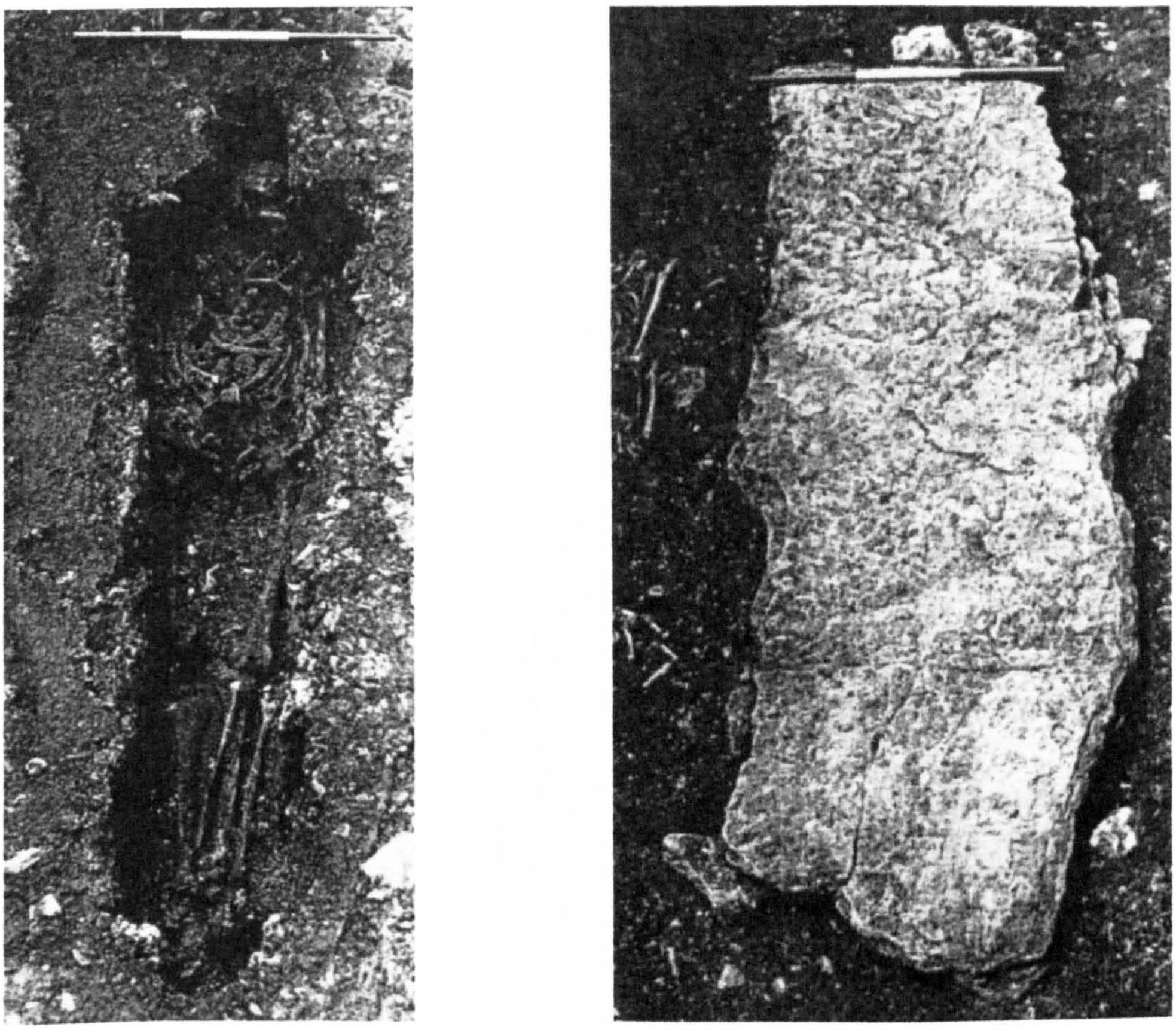


Figure 5.12. Diagram of grave 421 from SOU 32(Ha) viewed from above to show position of wood stains from a coffin of wooden lining around the body(top) and in section to show ledges within the grave (lower images)
(from Morton 1992a:174)

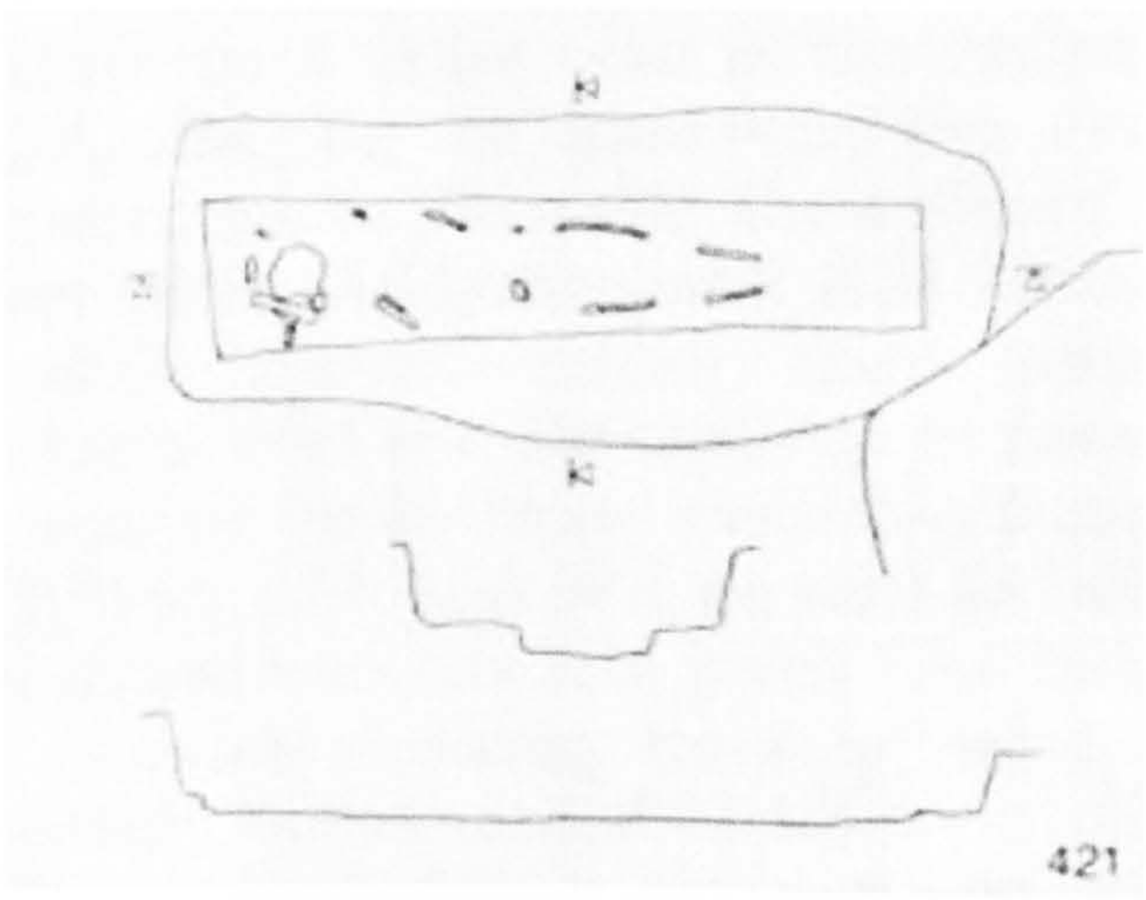


Table 5.7. Graves containing ledges identified within the study sample

Site	Date	Grave number	Sex	Age	Details of ledges or shelves	Evidence for coffins[i]	Grave goods
Bevis Grave (Ha)	Seventh- to tenth-century	18	Female?	Mature adult	Specific details not provided but describes as similar to grave 59 (see below)	None	No
		22	Unknown	Young adult	Specific details not provided but describes as similar to grave 59 (see below)	None	No
		31	Female	Old adult	Specific details not provided but describes as similar to grave 59 (see below)	None	No
		39	Unknown	Young adult	Specific details not provided but describes as similar to grave 59 (see below)	None	No
		52	Unknown	Unknown	Irregular ledge at west (head end) end of grave	None	No
		59	Unknown	Young adult	Pronounced ledges along each side & to lesser degree at each end	Wood stains	Iron knife
Winnall II (Ha)	Late seventh-century-early eighth-century	8	Female	Mature Adult	A square shelf on north side of grave not as deep as grave with a small quantity of charcoal resting on it	None	Silver linked pins, 2 penannular brooches, iron knife, Pig canine
		32	Female	Mature adult	Rough cut shelf at bottom of grave	None	Iron knife
		44	Female?	Old adult	Grave contained shelf sloping down to 7 inches.	None	No
SOU 32 (Ha)	Eighth-century	560	Female	Adult	Small step of 0.06m at west (head) end	Wood stains	No
		436	Unknown	Unknown	Small shelf of 0.16m at west end of grave		No
		421	Unknown	Unknown	Slot of 0.8m cut in base of grave, producing 0.08m shelves on each side	Wood stains	No
		465	Unknown	Unknown	Grave contains a 0.05m deep slot, 0.65m x 0.35m, cut in base of grave.	None	No
Lowbury Hill (Bk)	Late seventh-or early eighth-century	Isolated barrow burial	Male	Old adult	The north end of the grave had a ledge about 9inches broad for about a third of the length of the grave on the east side about 6inches above the bottom.	None	Spearhead, shield boss, sword, hanging bowl, comb, etc...
Wells Cathedral (So)	Mid-late Saxon	150	Male	Young adult	Distinct ledge present in western end of grave		
Roche Court Down (Wi)	Late 6^{th} – 7^{th} century	1	Unknown	Juvenile	A 3 inch ledge was cut on all sides of the grave 16 inches above the base of the grave		

[i] No pillow stones or stone linings were found in any of the burials.

A total of 16 graves within the study sample possessed some form of shelf or ledge along at least one side of the grave (table 5.7). Thirteen of the burials came from three Hampshire cemeteries – Bevis Grave (Rudkin 2001:19), Winnall II (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:11,16 & 19) and SOU 32 (Morton 1992a:178), where they represented between 6.7 and 27.2% of all graves. Single examples are known from Wells Cathedral cemetery in Somerset (Rodwell 2001:68) and Roche Court Down II (Stone 1932:579). The final example is the richly furnished isolated barrow burial at Lowbury Hill in Berkshire (Atkinson 1916:16).

Ledges may not necessarily have served the same function within each cemetery or even within each grave. Although the quality of available information on the nature of the ledges within the study sample is variable, it is clear that there are considerable differences in the form of these ledges. It has been suggested that ledges may have served to support some form of cover over the grave (Hogarth 1974:111), performing a function analogous to that suggested for some stone linings. None of the graves with ledges contain stone linings and it is possible that some of the ledges seen in graves from Bevis Grave and Winnall II may have replaced stones in supporting wooden grave covers. Such a role is more probable when ledges are present on opposing sides of the grave, yet seven of the graves have only one ledge present, which suggests that this is unlikely to have been the only function of these ledges. Furthermore, even where there are two ledges present in some cases, such as two graves from SOU 32, the ledges are very unlikely to have supported a grave cover. The height of the ledge in grave 560 from SOU 32 (Ha) at 0.06m is insufficient to allow clearance of a body, while the height of another from grave 436 in the same cemetery at 0.16m would at best barely clear a body (Morton 1992a:178). Instead of supporting some form of grave cover, it has been suggested that the ledges in these two graves served to define the area of the grave where the body was placed, echoing similar features seen at Norwich (Ayres 1985:19).

Three of the graves with ledges also contained wood stains indicative of timber structures. The presence of timber in some of these graves may be associated with the ledges. Grave 421 at SOU 32 had a 0.08m deep rectangular slot cut into its base, which produced a regular ledge on all four sides of the grave (figure 5.12) (*ibid.*:174). The dimensions and position of the slot correspond to the wood stains which are all that survive of the wooden container the body was buried in and suggest that in this case the ledges were created by setting a wooden container into the base of the grave, and may also provide an explanation of a similar slot seen in grave 465 in the same cemetery, although in this case no wood stains are present (*ibid.*:178). A direct relationship between ledges and timber structures is less evident in the

other two graves. There appears to be no relationship between the wood stains surrounding the burials in grave 560 at SOU 32 and low ledge at the western end of the grave. Evidence for a timber structure is also found in grave 59 at Bevis Grave. The ledges in this grave initially appeared to have been created from compacting chalk around a coffin (Rudkin 2001:19). Yet the wood stains that indicated the position of the timber structure clearly lay within the inner edge of the ledges in several places indicating that the compacted layer was not simply produced by infilling around the coffin or wooden lining.

Overall, when taken as a group this sample of graves containing ledges share a common form, but not necessarily a common function. Ledges seem to have been cut into graves, particularly in the middle Saxon period, by certain communities to perform a variety of functions from supporting grave covers to embedding coffins and defining the area of the grave where the body was placed.

5.2. Grave furnishings

5.2.1. The evidence for the use of grave goods in early medieval Wessex

The use of grave goods has been the primary focus of the analysis of early medieval mortuary behaviour for over two hundred years and more recently the subject of several comprehensive national and regional studies (Stoodley 1999a; Lucy 1998; 2000; Geake 1997). A detailed analysis of the use of grave goods in early medieval Wessex is beyond the scope of this study. Consequently, the analysis in this section is confined primarily to a consideration of the range of grave goods used within the Wessex heartlands between the seventh and eleventh centuries. In addition, the geographical and chronological distribution of furnished burial within the study area, as well as the role of age and sex on the type of grave goods accorded an individual are briefly examined in sections 5.3, 5.4 & 5.5.

Grave goods were identified in a total of 64 (64%) of the cemeteries within the dataset, with furnished burials consisting of between 0.9% and 81.8% of the cemetery population (table 5.8). Within the dataset, 355 burials (15.8% of the dataset of seventh- to eleventh-century burials) contained grave goods. Figure 5.13 illustrates the relative incidence of the more common grave goods (examples illustrated in figures 5.14, 5.15 & 5.16). The most prevalent grave goods within the study sample were knives, which were found with 226 burials (63.7% of all burials with grave goods)[10] and buckles, which were found in 71 burials (20.0%). All

[10] Number of burials with grave goods includes all burials with definite and possible grave goods.

Table 5.8. Distribution of grave goods within the study area by cemetery

(Table continues overleaf)

Site	County	Date	Type of site[1]	No. of burials	No. of burials with		% of burials in cemetery with grave goods[2]
					Buckles/knives	Other grave goods	
Ilsley Down Barrow	Berkshire	7th-8th century	Barrow	2	1	1	-
Lowbury Hill		Late 7th- early 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Burghfield		7th-century	Cemetery	50	16	17	66.0%
Cross Barrows, East Ilsey III		7th- early 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Wraysbury		Middle Saxon	Cemetery	3	-	1	-
Reading II		Early 9th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Exeter Cathedral	Devon	Middle-late Saxon	Cemetery	114	-	1	0.9%
Bargates	Dorset	Late 6th-seventh-century	Cemetery	39	11	12	69.7%
Portesham		Late 7th-early 8th century	Cemetery	9	-	1	11.0%
Maiden Castle		7th-century	Barrow	2	-	1	-
Hambledon Hill		Seventh or 8th-century	Cemetery	13	1	1	15.3%
Bradford Peverell		Late 7th-early 8th century	Cemetery	18	4	7	61.0%
Pentridge, Long Crichel 7		7th century	Barrow	3	-	1	33.3%
Woodyates Inn I		7th-century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Ulwell		7th-century	Cemetery	55	1	-	1.8%
Trumpet Major, Dorchester		7th-century	Cemetery	8	-	3	37.5%
Lower Brook Street	Hampshire	Late 7th-early 8th century	Cemetery	4	1	2	75.0%
Winnall II		Late 7th-century	Cemetery	47	14	14	59.6%
West Ham		Late 6th-7th-century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Snell's Corner		7th-century	Cemetery	33	14	13	81.8%
Preshaw		7th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Oliver's Battery		Late 7th-early 8th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Portsdown II		7th- 8th century	Cemetery	21	1	2	14.3%
Portsdown III		Middle Saxon	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Portway West		Late 6th – 7th century	Cemetery	12	2	4	50.0%
St. Mary's Stadium 1		Late 7th-early 8th century	Cemetery	26	6	17	88.5%
Cook Street		Early 8th-century	Cemetery	21	1	-	4.8%
SOU 13		7th-9th century	Cemetery	81	2	-	2.5%
New Gaol Field/ Clifford Street		8th-century	Cemetery	11	-	2[3]	18.2%
Bevis' Grave		7th-10th century	Cemetery	88	15	5	22.7%
Staple Gardens		9th-11th century	Cemetery	288	-	12[3]	4.2%
Meon Hill		Saxon	Cemetery	10	1	3	40.0%
Old Dairy Cottage		Late 8th-early 11th century	Cemetery	17	2	2	23.5%
Stockbridge Down		Late Saxon	Cemetery	41	3	5	19.5%
Westgate, Southampton		9th-11th century	Cemetery	3	1	-	33.3%

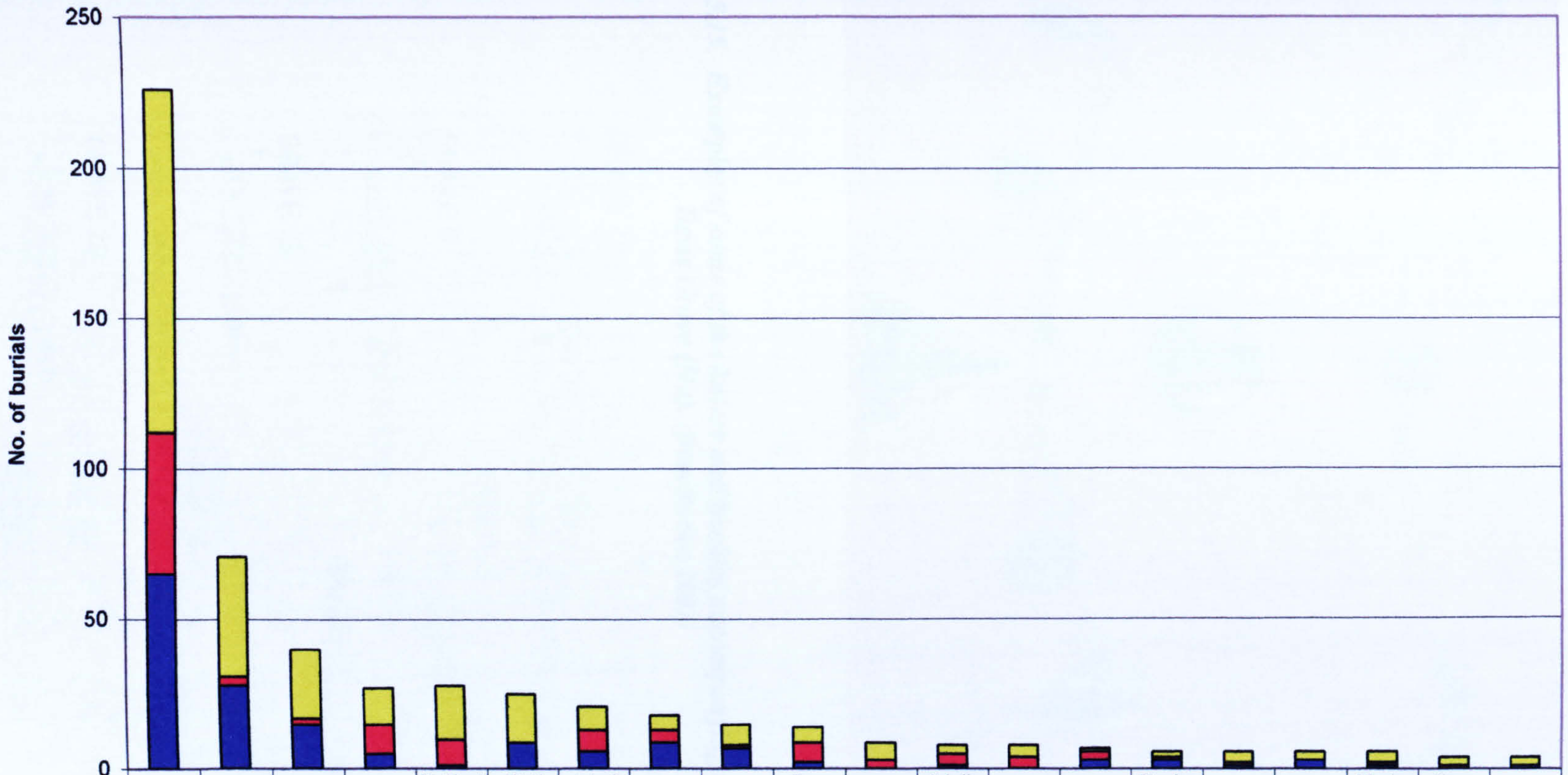
[1] Barrow refers to primary or secondary burials within barrows; isolate refers to one or two burials not associated with a cemetery or barrow.
[2] Only calculated from sites with more than 2 burials.
[3] Unclear if items in graves are grave goods or accidental inclusions.

Site	County	Date	Type of site[4]	No. of burials	No. of burials with		% of burials in cemetery with grave goods[5]
Didcot Power Station	Oxfordshire	7th century	Cemetery	17	4	8	70.6%
Longcot		Late 6th-early 8th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Frilford II		7th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Long Wittenham II		7th century	Cemetery	10	4	2	60.0%
Cannington	Somerset	4th-7th century	Cemetery	55	13	11	43.6%
Camerton		Middle Saxon	Cemetery	116	25	19	37.9%
Barrow Hill, Buckland Dinham		7th century	Cemetery	1	-	1	-
Hicknall Slait, Compton Pauncefoot		Late 7th century	Cemetery	4	-	1	25.0%
Wembdon Hill, Bridgewater		7th-9th century	Cemetery	12	-	2	16.6%
Abbeymeads, Swindon	Wiltshire	Middle-late Saxon	Cemetery?	1	-	1	-
Monkton Deverill		7th century	Cemetery	15	1	-	6.7%
Roundway Down, barrow 1		7th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Mere		7th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Perham Down		7th century	Isolated	1	-	1	-
Alvediston, barrow 1C		Late 7th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
West Knoyle I		Late 7th – early 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Swallowcliffe Down		Late 7th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
"The Fox", Purton		Late 7th-early 8th century	Cemetery	4	1	2	75.0%
Coombe Bissett		Early 7th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Ford, Barrow 1		Late 7th – early 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Rodmead Down Barrow		7th-early 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Roundway Down, Barrow 3		7th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Roundway Down, Barrow 7		Late 7th – 8th century	Barrow	1	-	1	-
Yatesbury II		7th century	Barrow	2	-	2	-
Shrewton		Early 7th century	Isolate	1	-	1	-
Winkelbury II		7th-8th century	Cemetery	30	6	2	26.7%
Winkelbury III		Middle Saxon	Isolated	1	1	-	-
Roche Court Down II		Late 6th-7th century	Cemetery	16	1	2	18.8%

[4] Barrow refers to primary or secondary burials within barrows; isolate refers to one or two burials not associated with a cemetery or barrow.
[5] Only calculated from sites with more than 2 burials.

Figure 5.13. Type of grave goods found within study sample

N.B. Only includes grave good types found in four or more burials



	Knife	Buckle	Spearhead	Pin	Necklace/ pendant	Shield boss	Animal bones	Coins	Seax	Bone comb	Brooches	Spindle Whorl	Chatelaine	tags	Hanging bowl	Shears	Steel	Wooden Boxes	Purse mount	Swords
Unknown	114	40	23	12	18	16	8	5	7	5	6	3	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	3
Female	47	3	2	10	9	0	7	4	1	7	3	4	4	3	1	1	0	1	1	0
Male	65	28	15	5	1	9	6	9	7	2	0	1	0	3	3	1	3	1	0	1

Grave goods

Figure 5. 14. Gold jewellery from the late seventh-century barrow burial on Roundway Down, Wiltshire.
(from Campbell 1982:35).

Figure 5.15. Examples of some of the knives and buckles accompanying burials from Bevis Grave (Ha). *(from Rudkin 2001)*

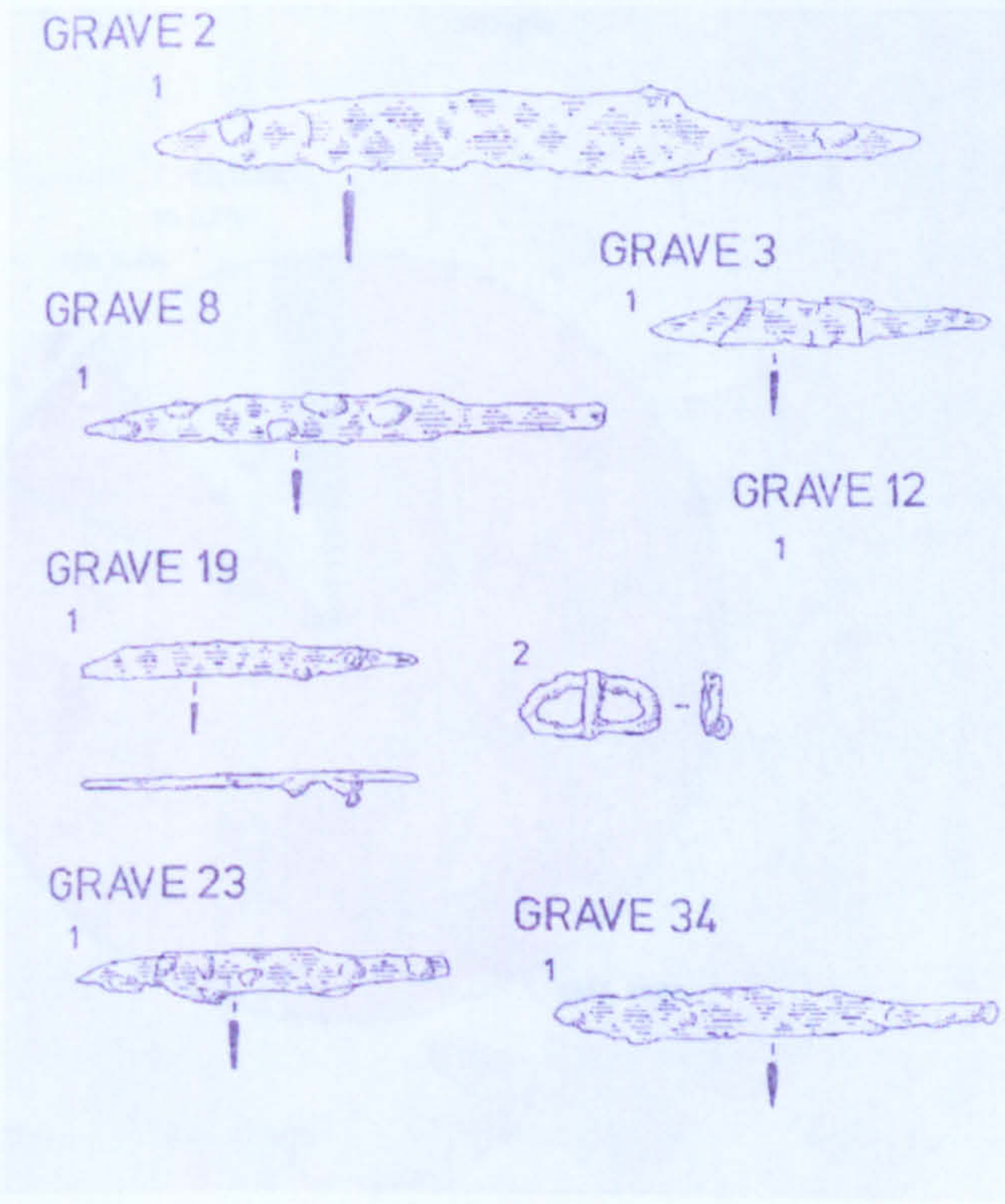
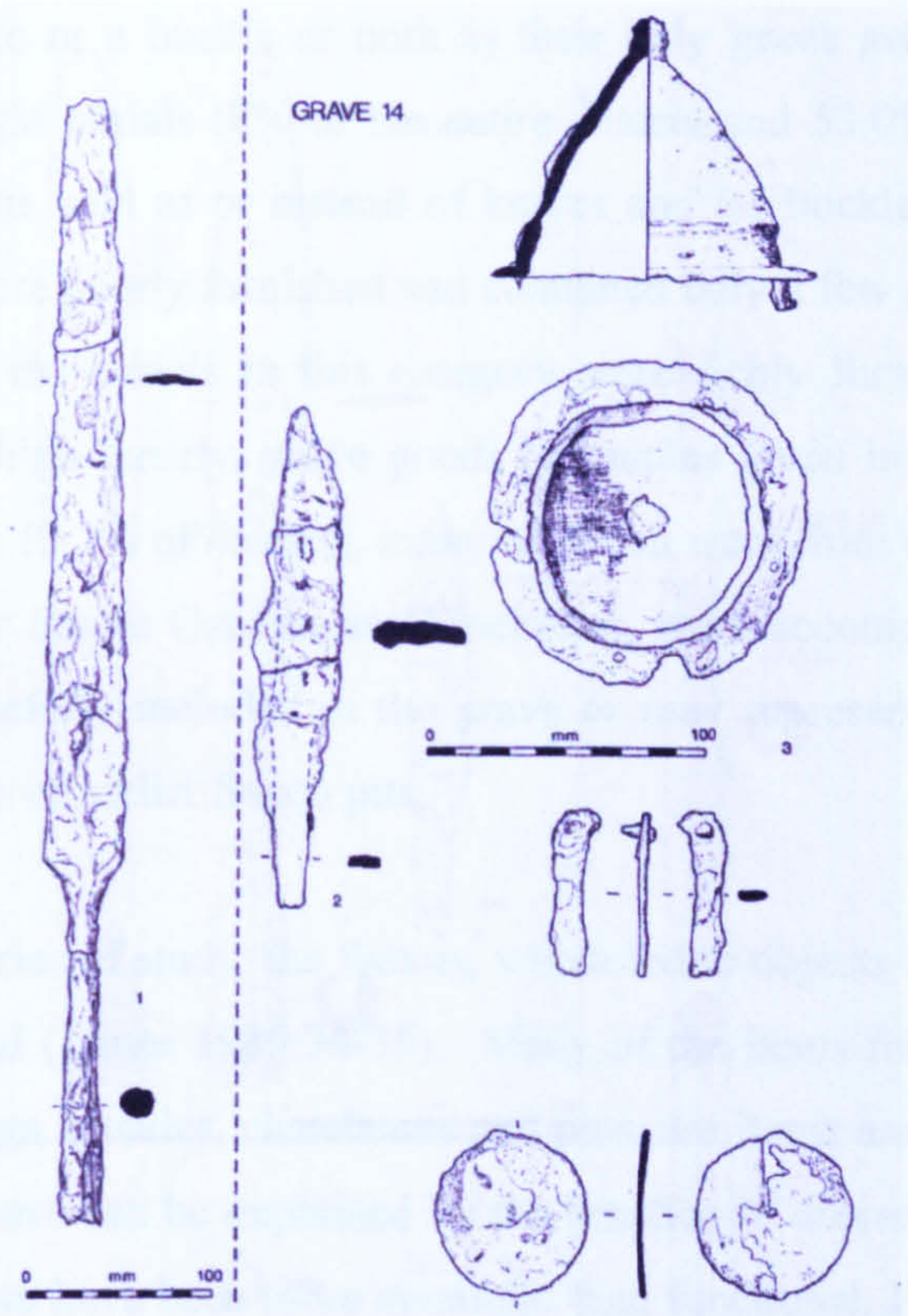


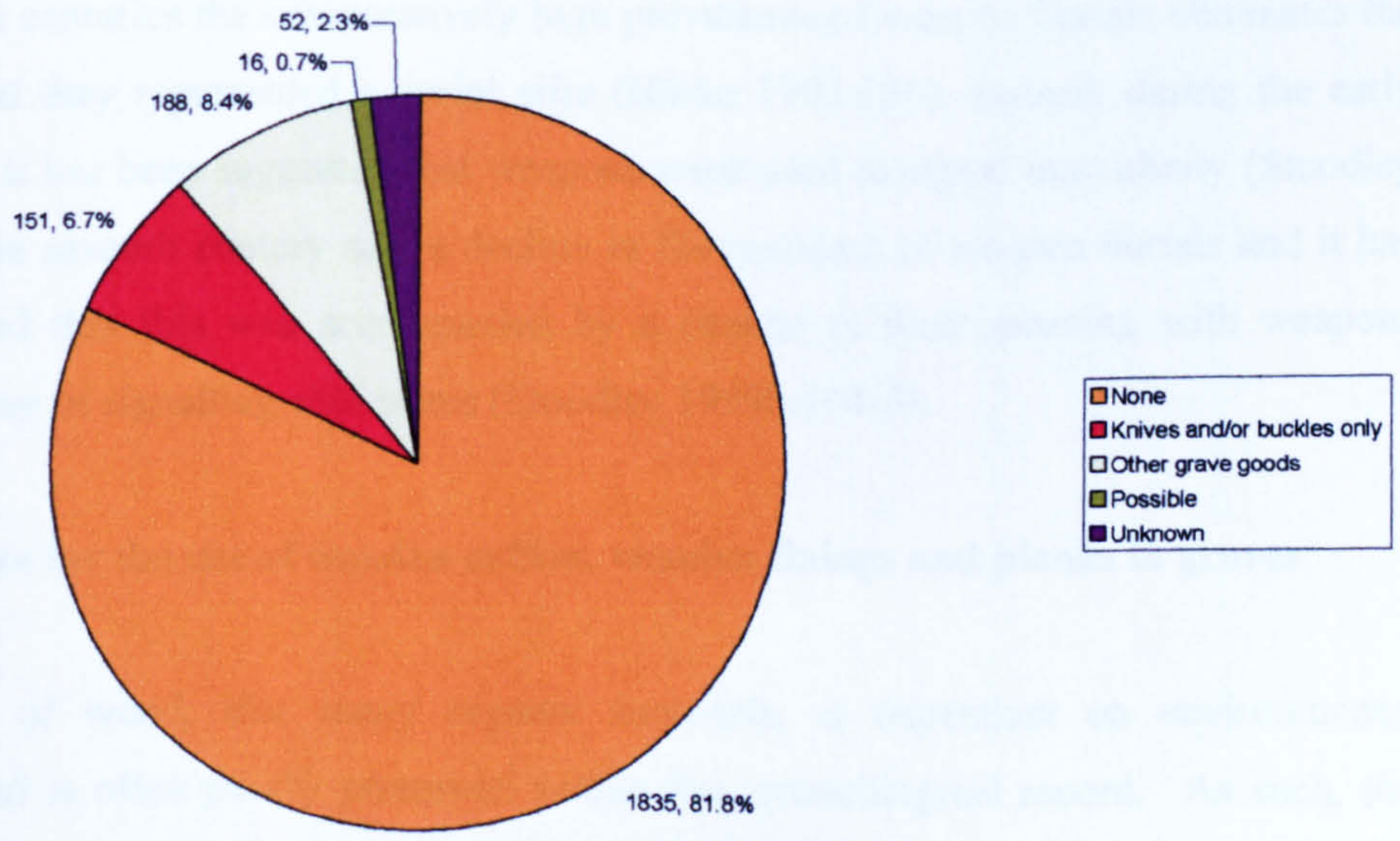
Figure 5.16. Grave goods in grave 14 from the late sixth and seventh century at Bargates (Do) *(from Jarvis 1983)*



1. Spearhead; 2. knife; 3. shield boss (rivet and fragmentary handle from shield boss also depicted).
Scale: No. 1 ⅓; Nos 2 & 3 ½; fragment of handle and rivet full size.

Figure 5.17. Distribution of furnished burial by type

N.B. The data labels give the number of burials within a category first, followed by that value as a percentage of the study sample.



other grave goods occurred in less than 12% of the furnished burials within the sample. One hundred and fifty-one burials (6.7% of the entire dataset and 42.5% of furnished burials) contained either a knife or a buckle or both as their only grave goods (figure 5.13). One hundred and eighty-eight burials (8% of the entire dataset and 53.0% of furnished burials) contained other items as well as or instead of knives and /or buckles. The majority of the burials in this group were poorly furnished and contained only a few grave goods. However, a small percentage of the burials in this category were richly furnished containing large assemblages of, often high quality, grave goods (examples given in table 5.9). This group also includes 16 burials (0.7% of dataset), many of which were from urban contexts, such as SOU 32 in Hamwic or Staple Gardens in Winchester, were accompanied by items which may have been purposefully included in the grave or may represent accidental inclusions from underlying Roman or earlier Saxon pits.

Despite over two centuries of study, the factors, which led to objects being placed in graves, are not fully understood (James 1989:34-35). Many of the items found in graves, such as brooches, pendants, rings, buckles, chatelaines and pins, are items associated with dress and their presence in the grave can be explained by the practice of dressed burial. The presence of other items is likely to have been more symbolic than functional. For example, the use of vessels, such as hanging bowls, may have been symbolically linked to feasting (Geake 1997:84). In some cases, the remains of food have been found within the vessels, such as the crab-apples in the hanging bowl from the barrow burial at Ford Laverstock (Musty 1969:109). The reason for including an item in a grave could, also, change with time. The symbolism of weapon burials appears to have changed in the seventh century. During the fifth and sixth centuries the comparatively high prevalence of weapon burials eliminates the possibility that they represented a social elite (Härke 1992:150). Instead, during the early Saxon period it has been suggested that weapons were used to signal masculinity (Stoodley 1999a:29). The seventh century saw a decline in the numbers of weapon burials and it has been suggested that this was accompanied by a change in their meaning with weapons becoming a way of signalling elite status (Stoodley 1999b:104-5).

5.2.2. Evidence for the use of wooden coffins, wooden linings and planks in graves

The survival of wood, like many organic materials, is dependant on environmental conditions, and is often poorly preserved within the archaeological record. As such, the survival of wooden structures, including coffins and wooden planks, will vary significantly both between and within sites. Examples of well preserved Anglo-Saxon coffins, planks and wooden linings have been recovered from water-logged sites at Swinegate in York (NYk)

Table 5.9. Examples of richly furnished seventh- and eighth-century graves within the study area.

Site	Burial number	Date of burial	Age and sex of occupant	Within cemetery or isolated burial	Associated barrow	Grave goods
Ford, Laverstock (Wi)	N/A	Late 7th or early 8th century	Male, 40-50 years	Isolated burial	Yes	2 spearheads, iron shield boss, iron studs, iron seax & sheath, Iron buckle, bone comb, bronze hanging bowl, hook-ended iron strip.
Swallowcliffe Down (Wi)	N/A	Late 7th century	Female?, 18-25 years	Isolated burial	Yes	2 buckets, iron vessel, 2 palm cups, 2 knives, 4 silver safety-pin brooches, strap end, bone comb, 2 beads, satchel & suspension belt, bronze-mounted box, bronze water sprinkler, silver spoon, iron ?spindle.
West Ham (Ha)	N/A	7th, possibly late 6th, century	Unknown	Isolated burial	No	Knife, 2 spearheads, bone playing pieces, fragments of a hanging bowl, iron bowl possibly a shield boss.
Rodmead Down Barrow (Wi)	N/A	7th or early 8th century	Unknown	Isolated burial	Yes	Knife or seax, buckle, shield boss, 2 spearheads, seax, bucket, bronze skillet
Lowbury Hill (Ox)	N/A	Late 7th or early 8th century	Male, 45+ years	Isolated burial	Yes	Knife, 2 buckles, shield boss, spearhead, hanging bowl, bone comb, sword, strip of pierced bone, possible hooked tag, 1 blade of a pair of shears, ?firesteel.
Combe Bissett (Wi)	N/A	Early 7th century	Unknown	Isolated burial	Yes	2 knives, 3 buckles, shield boss, 3 spearheads, sword & scabbard with pyramids, bronze skillet, wooden vessel, palm cup, cone beaker.
Snell's Corner (Ha)	6	7th century	Female, age indeterminate	Cemetery	Cemetery in vicinity of barrow	2 knives, possible necklace (consisting of an annular brooch, a glass bead, 2 8-shaped bronze links), bronze pin, bronze finger ring, chatelaine, 2 bronze bracelets, iron spatulate tool, a 2nd annular brooch.
St. Mary's Stadium I (Ha)	4202	Late 7th to early 8th century	Female, 18-25 years	Cemetery	No	Necklace (consisting of a gold pendant, 4 silver bullae & 4 glass beads), wooden box with copper alloy and iron fittings, silver disc, 2 scettas, silver lamella with impression of sceatta, iron object.
St. Mary's Stadium I (Ha)	5537	Late 7th to early 8th century	Unknown	Cemetery	No	Knife, 2 spearheads, shield boss, seax in scabbard, sword.

Table 5.10. Burials containing evidence for wooden coffins and/or linings within the study sample by cemetery.

Site	Date	Nature of evidence for wooden funerary structure										No. of burials with coffins in cemetery	% of graves with evidence for wooden coffins/ linings in the cemetery
		No. of burials[i]	Wood stains	Charcoal lines	Wood stains & nails	Nails	Nails & coffin fittings	Wood stains & coffin fittings	Impressions	Impression & nails	Possible[ii]		
Tolpuddle Ball	Roman –Middle Saxon[iii]	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	1	100
Henley Wood (So)	Early-mid Saxon	73	–	–	–	8	–	–	–	–	–	8	10.9
Pentridge Woodyates (Do)	Middle Saxon	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	100
Roundway Hill Barrow 1 (Wi)	Middle Saxon	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	100
Winklebury Hill (Wi)	Middle Saxon	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	100
Stoneage Barton (So)	Middle Saxon	4	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	50
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	Middle Saxon	15	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	13.3
Ulwell (Do)	Middle Saxon	55	–	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	5.5
Didcot (Ox)	Middle Saxon	17	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	5.9
Burghfield (Bk)	Middle Saxon	50	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	8.0
Winnall II (Ha)	Middle Saxon	47	1	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	3	5	10.6
Wembdon Hill (So)	Mid-late Saxon	13	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	15.4
Bevis Grave (Ha)	Mid-late Saxon	88	1	–	–	1	–	–	3	–	–	5	5.7
St. Mary's Stadium (Ha)	Middle Saxon	26	3	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	11.5
Hawkeswood Road (Ha)	Middle Saxon	6	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	16.7
SOU 862 (Ha)	Middle Saxon	16	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	2	12.5
Cook Street (Ha)	Middle Saxon	21	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	19.0
SOU 13 (Ha)	Middle Saxon	81	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1.2
SOU 32 (Ha)	Middle Saxon	11	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4	36.4
Porchester Castle (Ha)	Late Saxon	22	–	–	–	4	–	–	–	–	–	4	18.2
Wells Cathedral (So)	Mid-late Saxon	242	1	19	1	18	–	–	1	1	1	42	17.4
Ogbourne St. Andrews (Wi)	Mid-late Saxon	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	1	100
Temple of Sulis Minerva (So)	Late Saxon	15	5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	33.3
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	105	7	–	13	26	–	–	–	–	3	49	46.7
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Mid-late Saxon	114	–	–	1	6	18	1	1	–	5	32	43.9
Bath Abbey (So)	Late Saxon	31	–	–	1	8	2	–	–	–	–	11	35.5
Trowbridge (Wi)	Late Saxon	164	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	1.2
Staple Gardens (Ha)	Late Saxon	288	28	1	7	15	–	–	–	–	6	57	19.8
Total no. of burials			65	25	24	89	20	4	6	1	19	253	11.6

[i] Number of burials only includes burials that that can be securely dated to the study period.

[ii] The category of "possible" was used for the 2% of graves where there was a conflict of information in published excavation reports and /or archives as to whether there was any evidence for coffins/wooden linings within the grave. Graves were also placed in this category if there was a lack of clarity in the available data, making it impossible to be sure about the exact nature of the evidence for wooden structures within the grave.

(Pearson 1989:7) and Barton-upon-Humber (Li) (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982:291). This level of organic preservation is not found at any of the sites within the study area, and the evidence for the presence of wooden structures within graves in Wessex is therefore far less substantial and unambiguous.[11]

Two hundred and fifty-three graves (11.4% of the study sample) contained evidence for wooden linings/coffins and were found in 27 sites, with a frequency ranging between 1.2 % and 100% (table 5.10). Given the poor preservation of wood within the archaeological record, these figures are likely to be an under-representation of the incidence of wooden grave furniture within the study area. Furthermore, the differences in organic preservation across a single site make it impossible to determine accurately the levels of coffin use within a cemetery, while any differences seen in the incidence of wooden structures between sites may potentially owe as much to variations in the levels of organic preservation as to differences in the use of wooden grave structures.

Evidence for the use of wooden grave furniture took a variety of forms (figure 5.18). The most frequent category of evidence was the presence of iron nails around, below or directly above the body, which was found in 95 burials (37% of those with evidence for presence of wooden lining or coffins). Graves with nails found higher in the fill were excluded from the analysis. The number of nails recovered from the graves ranged from single nails, as from grave 723 at Bath Abbey (So) (Bath Archaeological Trust archive AHC 93) through to much higher numbers, such as the 17 nails from grave 74 from Barnstaple Castle (Dv) (Barnstaple Castle Archive). In some cases, the position of the nails seemed to relate to the general configuration of a wooden structure. For example, the only two nails present in the surviving end of a child's burial, grave 165 from Wells Cathedral (So), were where the corners of the coffin would be expected to lie (Rodwell 2001:68) while in other burials all the nails were located in just one area of the grave, as in grave 53 from Barnstaple Castle where all four nails lie on the left side of the body (Barnstaple Castle Archive). However, low numbers of nails or nails confined to just one part of the grave does not necessarily preclude the presence of a coffin. Many of the well preserved coffins from St. Peter's, Barton-upon-Humber were joined by wooden pegs and dowels and devoid of any nails, while others had just a few nails to strengthen the joints between the sides and base (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982: 301). A similar pattern was found among the 17 coffins recovered from Swinegate, York where the use of nails was the exception rather than the norm (Pearson 1989:7). Furthermore, factors

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[11] The one exception is the waterlogged isolated prone burial from a riverbank at Lake (Wi), which was covered by 14 loose oak timbers (McKinley 2003). However, the burial has been dated to the fifth- or sixth-century and lies outside the purview of this study.

such as incomplete recovery of nails during excavation and the high levels of post-burial disturbance seen in many later Saxon cemeteries may also have reduced the number of nails recovered and affected their distribution within the grave.

Sixty-seven graves (26% of graves containing evidence for wooden linings/coffins) contained organic stains presumed to be from timber structures within the grave (figure 5.20a). The amount of timber surviving within the grave in this form is highly variable. It can range from a small patch of wood staining, such as that observed by the left leg of the skeleton in grave 242 at Staple Gardens, through to an impression of much of the coffin, as seen in grave 225 in the same cemetery where the most of the base board survives along with the sides of the coffin to a height of c.24cm (Winchester Museums Service archive SG89). Twenty-four burials (9% of graves with evidence of wooden linings/coffins) contained both nails and wood stains. For example, grave 295 from Staple Gardens contained a wood stain under the body as well as 19 nails (Winchester Museums Service archive SG84 & SG89). A variant of wood stains in the form of lines of charcoal was seen in 10% of graves containing evidence for the presence of coffins/wood linings. The charcoal represented the remains of charred planks used in coffins or wood lining (*ibid.*:69). The most obvious example of a charred coffin comes from grave 115 at Wells Cathedral,[12] where the base, west end and part of north and south sides all survive (Rodwell 2001:69). In contrast, the narrow shape of grave 49, also from Wells, with its rounded ends suggests that the remains of charred timbers it contains are from a wooden lining rather than a coffin (*ibid.*:70). Charring of the boards is thought to enhance their survival in the soil (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982:301). The use of charred boards may also be symbolic. The use of charcoal grave linings is seen in a number of late Saxon cemeteries and it possible that the use of charred wood may have served an analogous symbolic function (see section 5.1.2).

In six graves (2% of graves containing evidence for wooden coffins/linings), the presence of a coffin/wooden lining can be inferred from the effect on the materials around it while a seventh grave combining this type of evidence with the presence of nails. In four graves – graves 48, 49 and 63 at Bevis Grave (Rudkin 2001:16, 19) and grave 293 at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:82) - the presence of a wood coffin or lining is suggested by the straight lines and sharp corners seen in the skeletal remains of earlier interments which appear to have been stacked around the outside of the wooden structures (figure 5.20b). In another grave, CB 66 from Exeter Cathedral, the impression of a coffin was left in the form of a rectangular depression in a bed of charcoal (Royal Prince Albert Museum Exeter Cathedral Excavations

[12] Radiocarbon date 660-980AD at 2σ level of confidence

Figure 5.18. Evidence for coffins/wooden linings

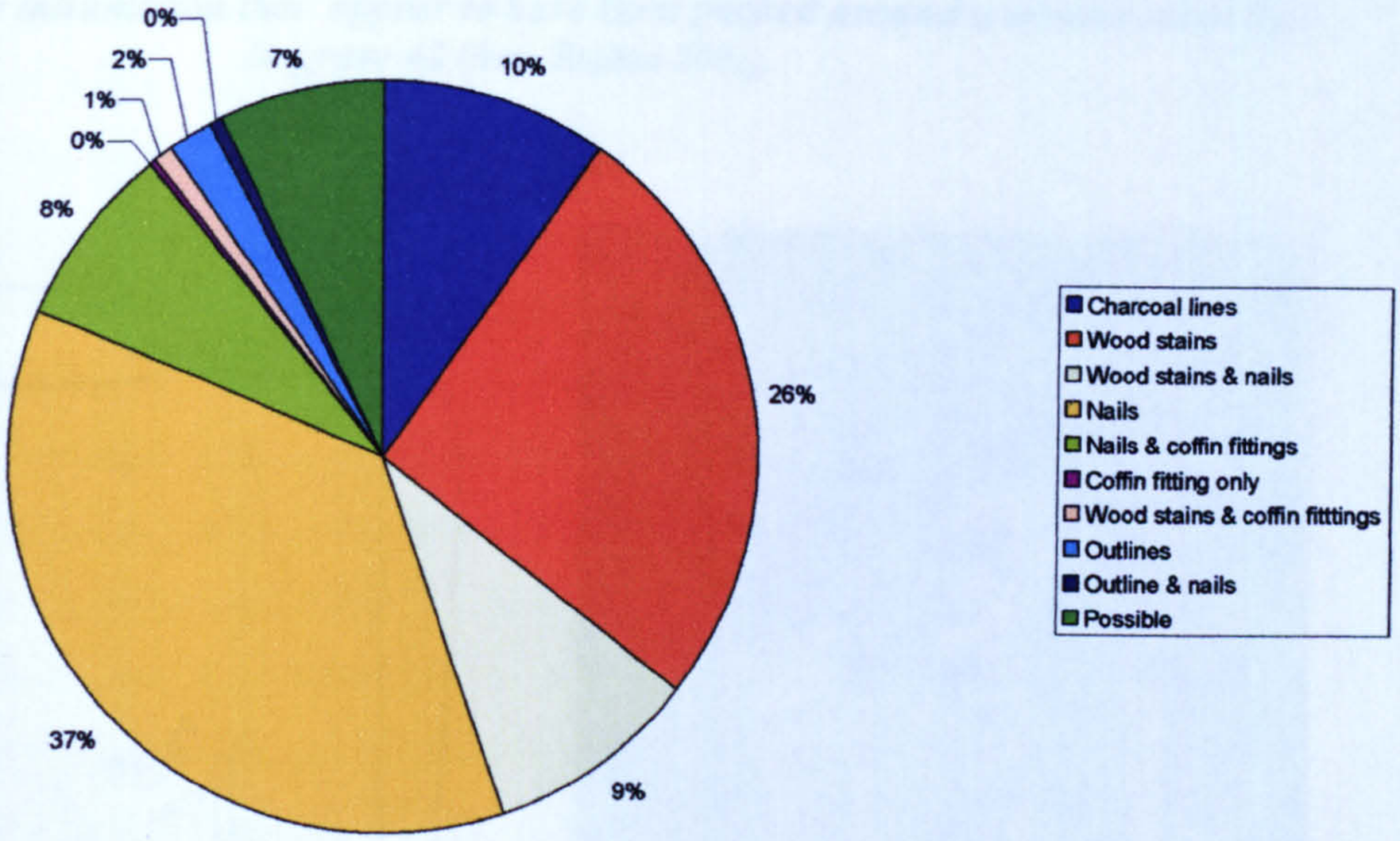
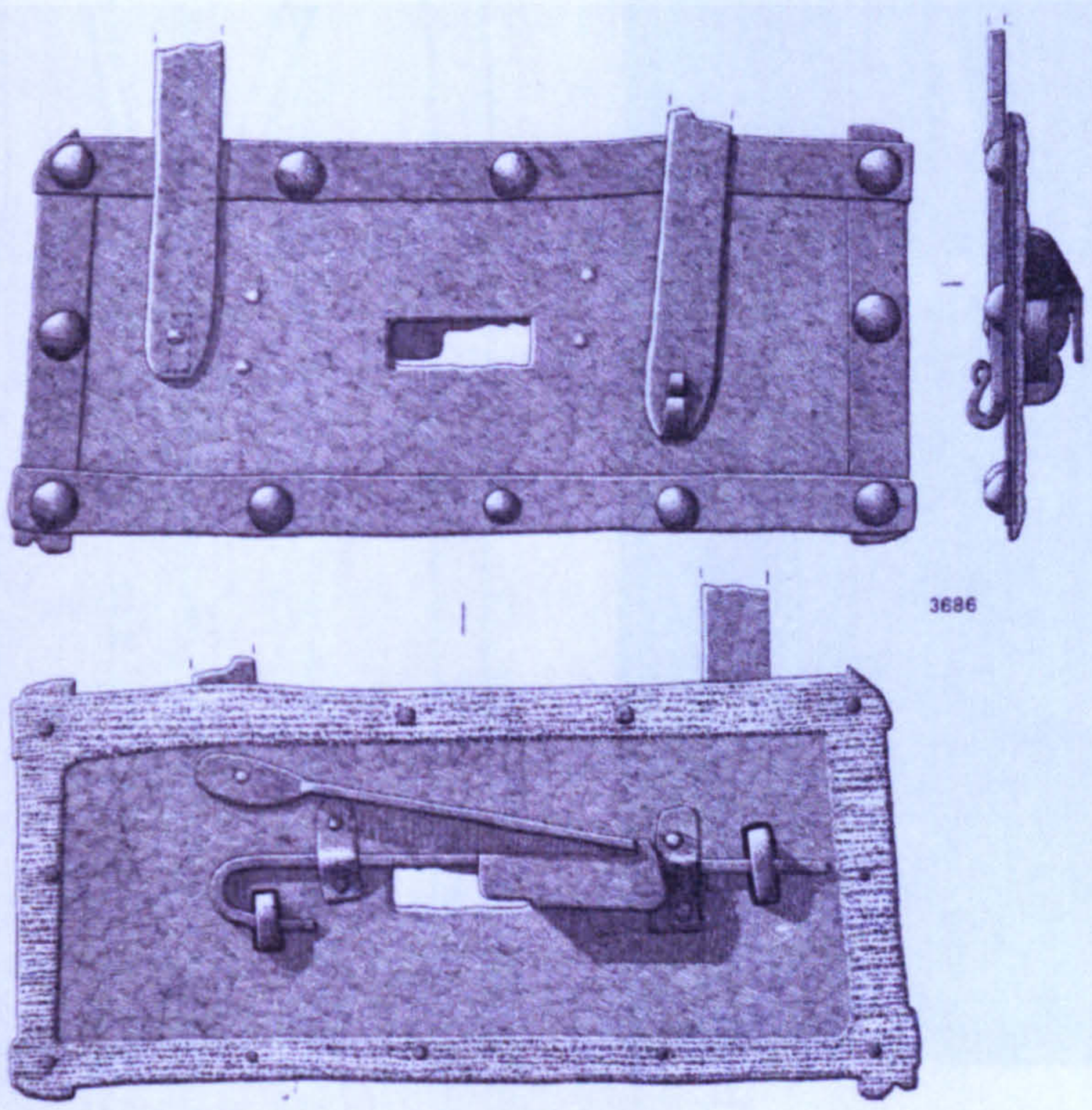


Figure 5.19. The mounted lock from a late ninth-century grave from the Old Minster in Winchester (Ha)
(from Biddle 1990a:1016)

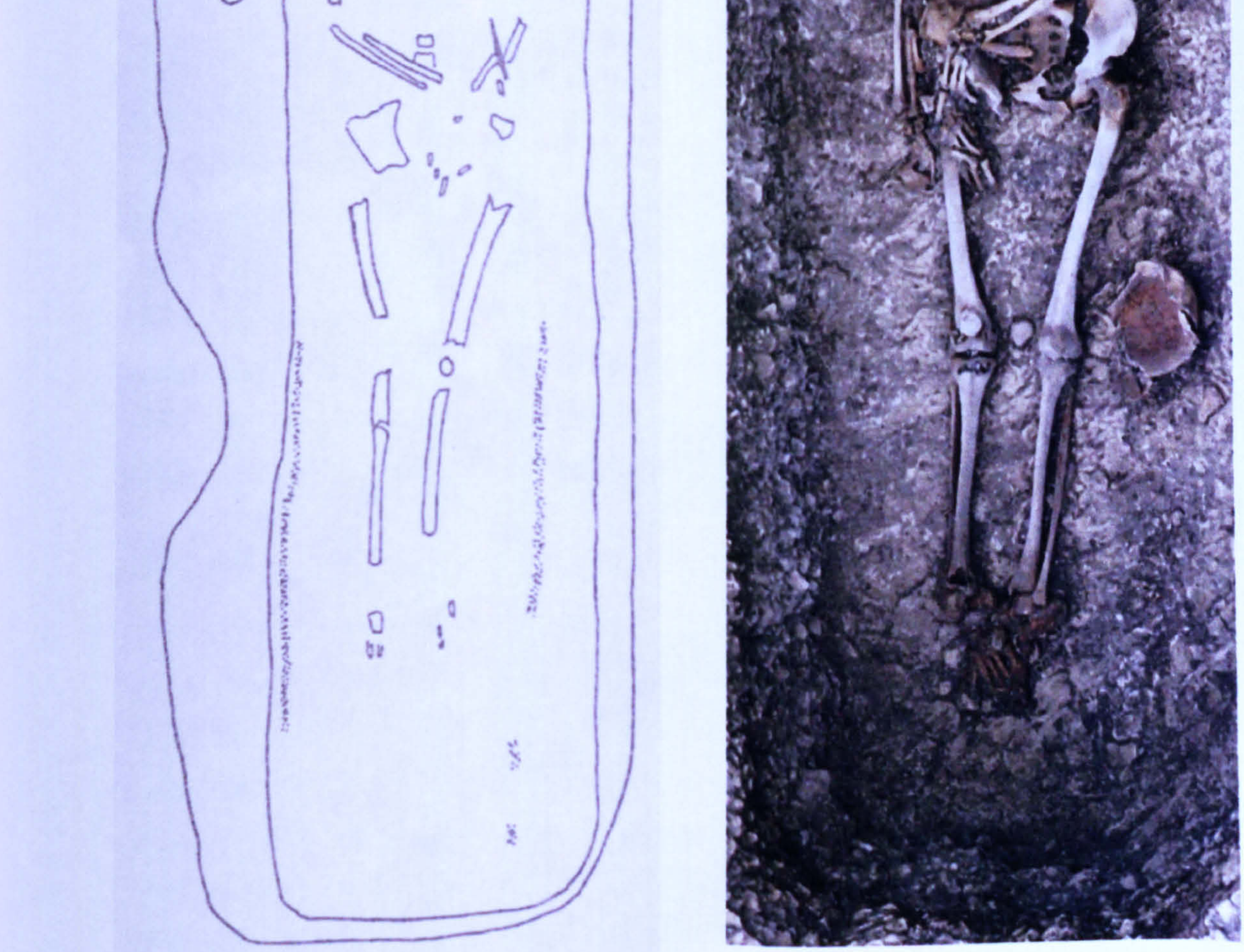


(Scale: 1:2)

Figure 5.20. Two burials from the seventh- to tenth-century cemetery of Bevis Grave (Ha) containing evidence for the presence of coffins or wooden linings in the form of (a) wood stains in grave 59 and (b) by the straight lines and sharp corners seen in the bones of an displaced earlier inhumation that appear to have been packed around a wooden structure in grave 42 *(from Rudkin 2001).*

(a)

(b)



archive) while a similar type of rectangular depression was seen in the earthen base of grave 151 at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:69). Finally, in grave 5139[13] from Tolpuddle Ball the presence of a wooden structure is suggested by chalk rubble which appears to have been packed above and around its sides (Hearne & Birbeck 1999:59 & 247; Dorset County Museum Archive 1999.86.3.1.719/1-2).

So far the type of evidence considered implies the presence of a wooden structure within the grave, but rarely offers much information on the form it might take. The use of wooden linings, coffins or planks, laid in the base of the grave, have been reported from early medieval cemeteries with greater preservation of organic material than seen within the study area (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982:291; Pearson 1989:7; Phillips & Heywood 1995:86). Occasionally, such distinctions are possible with the Wessex material. For example, skeleton 43 from the cemetery at the Temple of Sulis Minerva was buried within a plank cist, with one plank comprising each side of the cist and another forming the base (Bath Roman Museum Archive BATRN 1986.112—101, 116–105). However, such distinctions are not possible with much of the evidence from Wessex. For example, many of the wood stains seen in the graves from Staple Gardens lie beneath the skeleton. Does this then mean these burials were all laid on planks? Alternatively, does the timber below the bodies survive better due to variation in preservation or because it has less chance of being disturbed than the remains of wood placed along the side of the grave in a heavily intercut cemetery? Ultimately given the poor levels of preservation of organic materials seen in the study area, there is no way of determining if the wood stains seen below the skeletons represent a plank laid below the body, part of a wooden lining or part of a coffin and a similar argument can be made about the ambiguity of the evidence provided by nails and outlines. Thus, for much of this analysis, it is necessary for all forms of evidence for the presence of coffins/wooden lining or other timber structures to be treated as a single group.

There is, however, one exception to this policy. One category of evidence for wooden grave furniture, the presence of coffin fittings implies there was a coffin as opposed to a wood lining within the grave. Coffin fittings, in the form of iron straps and brackets were found in 24 graves. Nails were found with the coffin fittings in 20 graves (8% of graves containing coffins/wooden linings), while in four graves the coffin fittings were accompanied by wood stains. Coffin fittings were only found in two cemeteries, Bath Abbey (So) (Bath Archaeological Trust archive AHC 93) and Exeter Cathedral (Dv) (Henderson & Bidwell 1982:155), as well as in barrow burials at Ogbourne St. Andrews (Wi) (Cunnington

[13] Radiocarbon date 540-660AD at 2σ level of confidence

1885:346), Winklebury Hill (Wi) (Meaney 1964:277) and Roundway Hill barrow 7 (Wi) (Cunnington 1860:165).[14]

Two other Wessex sites, not in the study sample, also had coffin fittings, the Old and New Minsters in Winchester where they represented 2.4% and 6.7% of the excavated populations respectively (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:223; 1995:517). The coffin fittings from Winchester were more elaborate than the iron strappings seen at Bath Abbey and Exeter Cathedral, and included iron rings, hinges and in one case a lock (figure 5.19) (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:229; 1995:517). Locks have been recovered from three graves at York Minster (*ibid.*). It has been suggested due to high levels of redundant metalwork, evidence for wear and repair and insect infestation that the two coffins in the three York graves were re-used domestic storage chests (*ibid.*:493 & 515).[15] It is possible that this may also be the case with the Winchester example.

The use of coffin fittings, although perhaps not the re-use of domestic chests, is indicative of added expenditure on funerary provision. Coffin fittings were found in barrow burials from Winklebury Hill, Roundway Down barrow 7 and Ogbourne St. Andrews and the elaborate coffins suggested by the iron fittings should be seen as one aspect of these often richly furnished high status burials. In contrast, the coffin fittings found at Bath Abbey and Exeter Cathedral come from late Saxon ecclesiastical contexts and while like the barrow burials, the presence of coffin fittings is indicative of additional expenditure within the funerary arena, the motivation that lay behind it may be significantly different. The correlation between coffin fittings and high status burials in late Saxon cemeteries is supported by their association with the use of charcoal beds. Only 23 burials within the study sample were accompanied by coffin fittings and 20 of them also lay on a bed of charcoal (table 5.11). A similar pattern was seen at the Old Minister in Winchester where 15 of the 22 burials with coffin fittings contained charcoal (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:229; *pers.comm.*). Finally, iron coffins fittings may not have been the only form of coffin elaboration within the study area. In 1896, a tenth-century lead cross was recovered during excavations of the Roman baths in Bath (figure 5.21) (Okasha 1971:52). The cross is thought to have been attached to a coffin

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[14] Although described as coffin fittings in the original nineteenth-century excavation reports, it has been suggested that the iron fittings from Roundway Hill Barrow 7 and the barrow burial from Winklebury Hill may have been from bed burials (Speake 1989:105). Therefore, both burials have been included in the discussion of evidence for coffins and bed burials (see section 5.2.3).

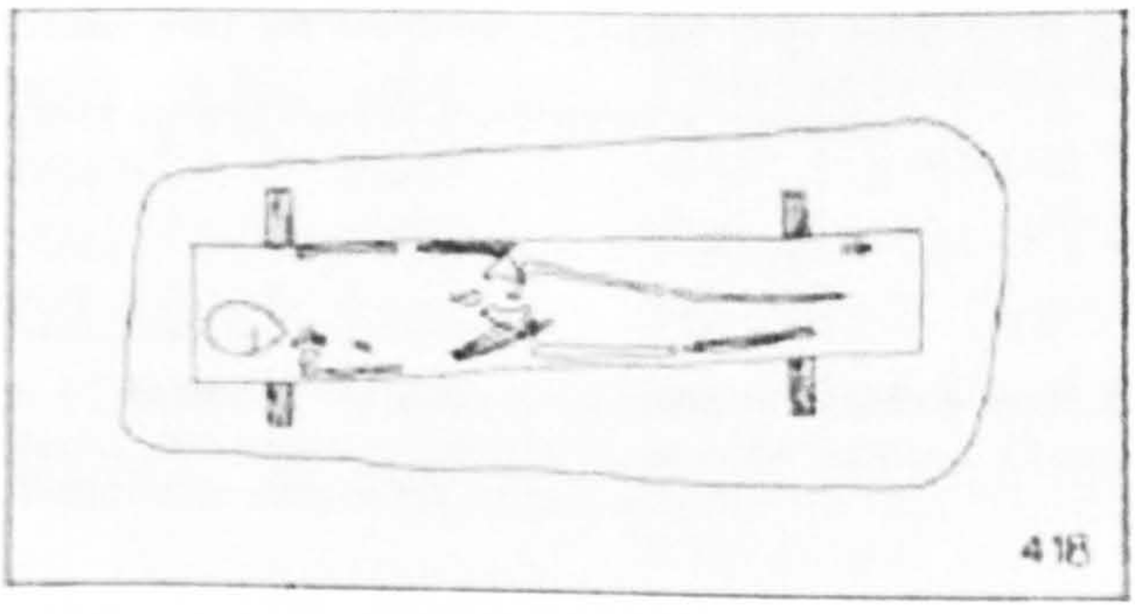
[15] The third lock was found in the fill of grave 94, which contained no body and no evidence for a coffin (Kjølbye-Biddle 1995:515).

Table 5.11. Evidence for coffins associated with charcoal burials

Site	Evidence for presence of coffins							
	None	Nails	Nails & wood stain	Coffin fittings	Lead coffin	Outline	Possible	Unknown
Exeter Cathedral	35	-	1	18	-	1	2	4
Staple Gardens	5		-	-	1	-	1	-
Bath Abbey	3	3	1	2	-	-	-	-
Barnstaple Castle	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romsey Abbey	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trowbridge	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cathedral Close	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	51	4	2	20	1	1	3	4
% of all charcoal burials	59.3%	4.6%	2.3%	23.3%	1.2%	1.2%	3.5%	4.6%

Figure 5.21. The 10th-century commemorative lead coffin fitting from Bath.
(from Davenport 2002:53)

Figure 5.22. Grave 418 from SOU 32, Southampton depicting the outline of the wooden coffin resting on two parallel cross supports set into the floor of the grave.
(from Morton 1992a:174)



(Cunliffe 1979:90) and bears an inscription[16] and the dedication – "In the (....)[17] year after the Incarnation of Our Lord, Eadgyvu died, a sister of the community, on September 17th" (Okasha 1971:52).

Apart from evidence for coffins or wooden linings, a number of graves also contained evidence of wooden fittings associated with coffins or containers. The coffin from grave 418 from the eighth-century cemetery at SOU 32 (Ha) rested on two parallel cross supports set into the floor of the grave (figure 5.22) (Morton 1992a:178). Another possible example was found in grave 2423 at Cook Street, another Hamwic cemetery of similar date (Garner 1993: 90). In this case only one cross piece survives and due to poor levels of preservation, its size and shape were difficult to discern. Modern disturbance at the other end of the grave may explain the absence of the second cross piece. Similar examples have also been found outside the study area most notably in the seventh- to eighth-century cemetery of St Peter's, Broadstairs (Kt) (Hogarth 1974:112). The presence of other associated timber structures are implied by post and stake holes. For example, it has been suggested that the six stake holes in the base of grave 2962 from Cook Street (Ha) may have served to hold the side planks in place (Garner 1993:90). A similar function may have been performed by the post holes found at the eastern corners of grave 407 at SOU 32 (Ha), although they may alternatively have been used to support some form of roofed structure (Morton 1992a:177). A similar role has been proposed for the four stakeholes at the corners of the grave from Winkelbury Hill III (Speake 1989:105). The presence of isolated postholes or stakeholes is usually interpreted as forming some form of grave maker and this will be discussed in chapter 6.

Wooden grave furniture, given the potential diversity of form, is unlikely to have served a single function. There is, however, an underlying theme of protecting the body. The wood surrounding the corpse, whether in the form of a coffin or a wooden grave linings, would have shielded it from the earth of the grave. Occasionally, stone and timber appear to have been combined to protect the body with a number of graves within the study sample containing evidence for both timber and stone (table 5.12). In some cases, it seems stones may have been used to support timber lining or alternatively packed around the coffin (see section 5.1.2.1). Coffins, wooden biers and planks may also have provided a means of transporting a corpse, prior to and during the funerary services.

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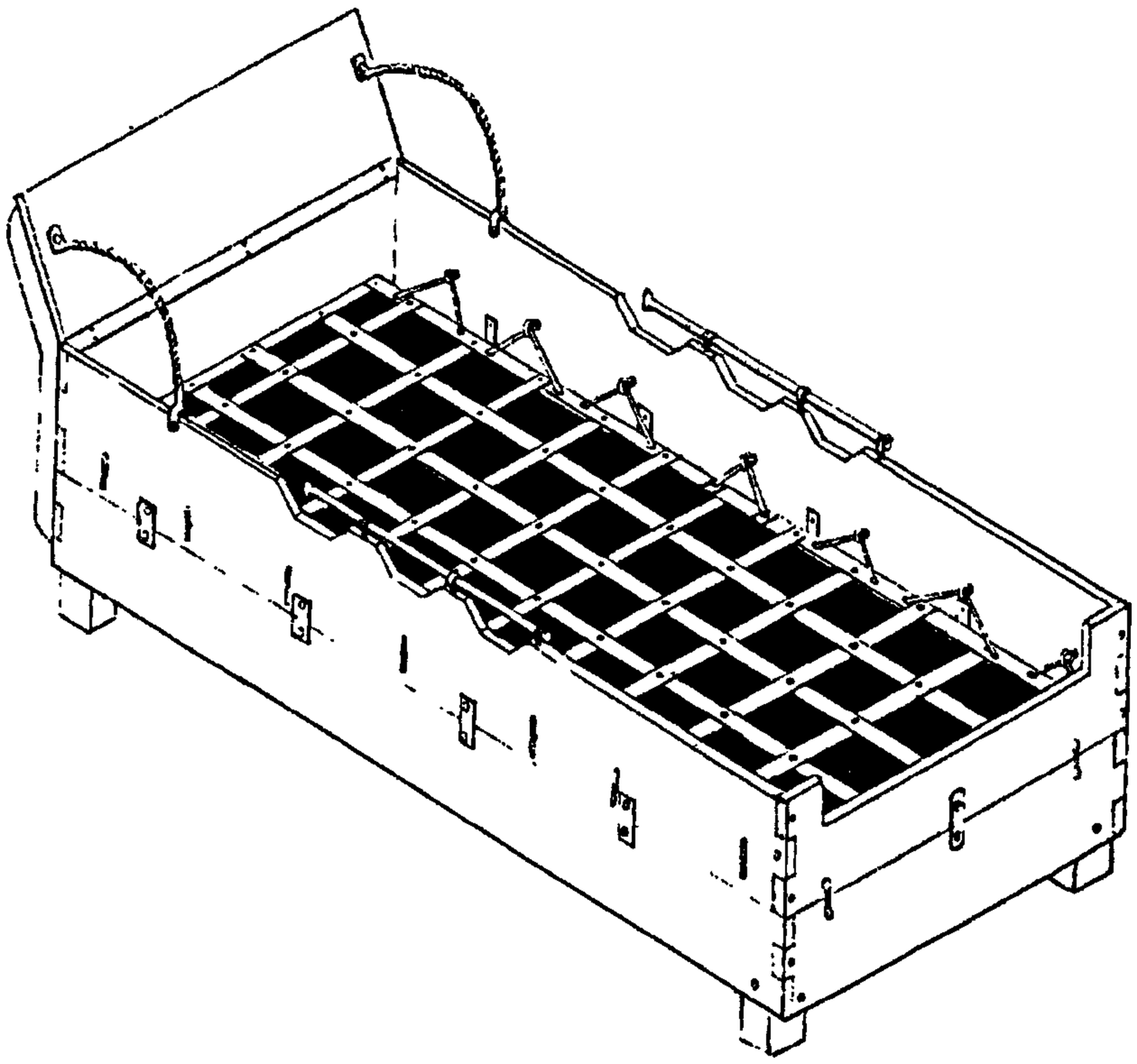
[16] The text of the inscription - "He who by the power of the Cross redeemed the world, burst asunder the gates of Hell, opened those of Heaven, gave peace to all and salvation to the faithful. O Christ, who ordered the birth of all purify me who am polluted by the stain of sin, I suppliantly beseech Thee, O Lord have mercy on me" (Okasha 1971:52).

[17] Text not legible.

Table 5.12. Stone lined graves containing evidence for coffins/wooden linings.

Site	Date	Type of stone lining						
		Few Stones			Partially lined		Possible stone lining	Complete lining
		Nails only	Woodstains/ Charcoal	Impression	Nails only	Woodstains/ Charcoal	Nails only	Nails only
Henley Wood	Early-middle Saxon	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	7th century	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Stoneage Barton (So)	7th century	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
Wembdon Hill (So)	7th-9th century	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Bevis Grave (Ha)	7th-10th century	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Bath Abbey (So)	Late Saxon	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	5	4	-	1	-	-	-
Wells Cathdral (So)	Mid-late Saxon	-	2	-	-	-	-	1
Total		6	10	1	1	3	1	1
% of graves containing stones		4.3%	7.1%	0.8%	0.8%	2.1%	0.8%	0.8%

Figure 5.23. Reconstruction of bed found in barrow burial on Swallowcliffe Down.
(from Speake 1989:95)



5.2.3. Bed Burials

The one distinctive form of wooden funerary furniture, not discussed in the previous section, are beds. Only one definite example of this practice of bed burial is known from the Wessex area - the richly furnished late seventh-century female barrow burial from Swallowcliffe Down (Wi) (Speake 1989). At this site, a Bronze Age barrow was partially destroyed by the creation of a large grave chamber into which was placed a wooden bed with iron fittings (see figure 5.23 for a possible reconstruction) upon which the body was placed. A further three burials within the study area have been suggested as possible bed burials: Roundway Hill barrow 1 (Wi), Pentridge Woodyates Inn 1 (Do) and Winklebury Hill, barrow 1 (Wi) (Speake 1989:105-107). However, while all three of these burials definitely contain distinctive iron fittings, whether their presence is indicative of a bed burial as opposed to an iron bound coffin or some other structure is less clear.[18] The most likely candidate of the three is the burial from Winkelbury Hill where some of the metalwork exhibits similarities to the iron bed fittings found at Swallowcliffe Down. Unfortunately, the grave had been disturbed in antiquity with only those fittings at the east end remaining *in situ*, which makes it impossible to determine if the iron fittings were once part of a bed or a coffin. The remaining two sites, Roundway Hill and Woodyates, are even more problematic as the iron fittings from both are no longer extant and no record of their position within the grave was made, making it impossible to draw any firm conclusions.

Bed burials are usually associated with richly furnished burials (Malim & Hines 1998:268), although there are a number of exceptions from outside the study area, including grave 4 from Cherry Hinton (Ca) (Speake 1989:102) and grave 29 from Shudy Camps (Ca) (Lethbridge 1936). Within the study area, three of the four possible bed burials are considered to have been richly furnished while the absence of grave goods from the fourth, Winklebury Hill, may be the result of the grave being robbed.[19] Many of the richest grave good assemblages from seventh-century Wessex are found in barrow burials. As such, it is perhaps not that surprising given the association between rich grave assemblages and bed burials that all of the postulated instances from Wessex lay beneath barrows as do many, but not all, of the examples found outside the study area.

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[18] The ironwork from the barrow burials at Pentridge Woodyates Inn 1, Winklebury Hill and Roundway Hill barrow 7 were described in the excavation reports as iron coffin fittings (see note 11) above and are included in sections on both bed burials and coffins.

[19] The burials at Swallowcliffe Down and Woodyates were also robbed, but the thieves were less efficient and sufficient grave goods survived to indicate that both were richly furnished.

The evidence suggests that the use of beds represents a comparatively rare aspect of the highly variable burial practices seen in the seventh century and one, which at least in Wessex, was closely associated with barrow burials. While the significance of bed burials is far from clear, it seems likely the public display of the body was an important factor (Speake 1989:112; Malim & Hines 1998:268). Unlike coffins which remove the body from view, the use of a bed within funerary rites provides a platform for display, one which was likely to have been particularly important within the context of richly furnished barrow burials.

5.2.4. Evidence for the use of lead coffins in early medieval Wessex

Wood was not the only material used to construct coffins within the study area. A lead coffin was found in the late Saxon cemetery at Staple Gardens (Ha) (Kipling & Scobie 1990:9). This is only known example of an early medieval lead coffin from the study area[20] (figure 5.24 & 5.25). The coffin contained the skeleton of a male of 25 to 35 years, which was radiocarbon dated to the tenth century (890-995AD at a 2σ level of confidence) (Winchester Museums Service Archive SG89). While the possibility that the coffin could be of Roman date, being re-used for a later burial cannot be excluded, it appears unlikely. Roman coffins were constructed by a combination of cutting and folding of lead sheet (Toller 1977:10). The number of lead sheets used in production varied, but a study, albeit one with a comparatively small sample size, found the body of approximately 75% of Roman coffins was constructed from a single sheet (*ibid.*:13). The body of the coffin from Staple Gardens was, by constrast, formed from six separate pieces of lead sheet joined together by applied strips of lead (figure 5.26), a construction method not seen among Toller's sample, which suggests that the coffin is unlikely to be of Romano-British manufacture.

The use of lead coffins was never likely to have been commonplace as their raw materials were expensive and their manufacture would have required specialist skills. Their use would have been confined to those of sufficient resources to afford more elaborate funerary provision. The Staple Gardens burial, with its deep bed of charcoal and flint pillow stones was the most elaborate within the cemetery and one of the most elaborate of the late Saxon burials within the study sample. Lead coffins are likely to have been associated with high status. For example, the lead coffin mentioned in Felix's eighth-century *Life of St. Guthlac* was a gift to the saint from Abbess Ecgburh, the daughter of King Aldwulf[21] (Swanton 1975:57). Yet, even though lead coffins are likely to have been rare, the survival of only a

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[20] A lead coffin was discovered under the west end of the south nave of Romsey Abbey in 1839 and has been suggested to be of Saxon date, but this dating is not secure (Scott 1996:23).
[21] King of the East Angles

Figure 5.24. The lead coffin with lid in place from the tenth-century grave 546 at Staple Gardens (Ha) (view from north)
(©Winchester Museums Service)

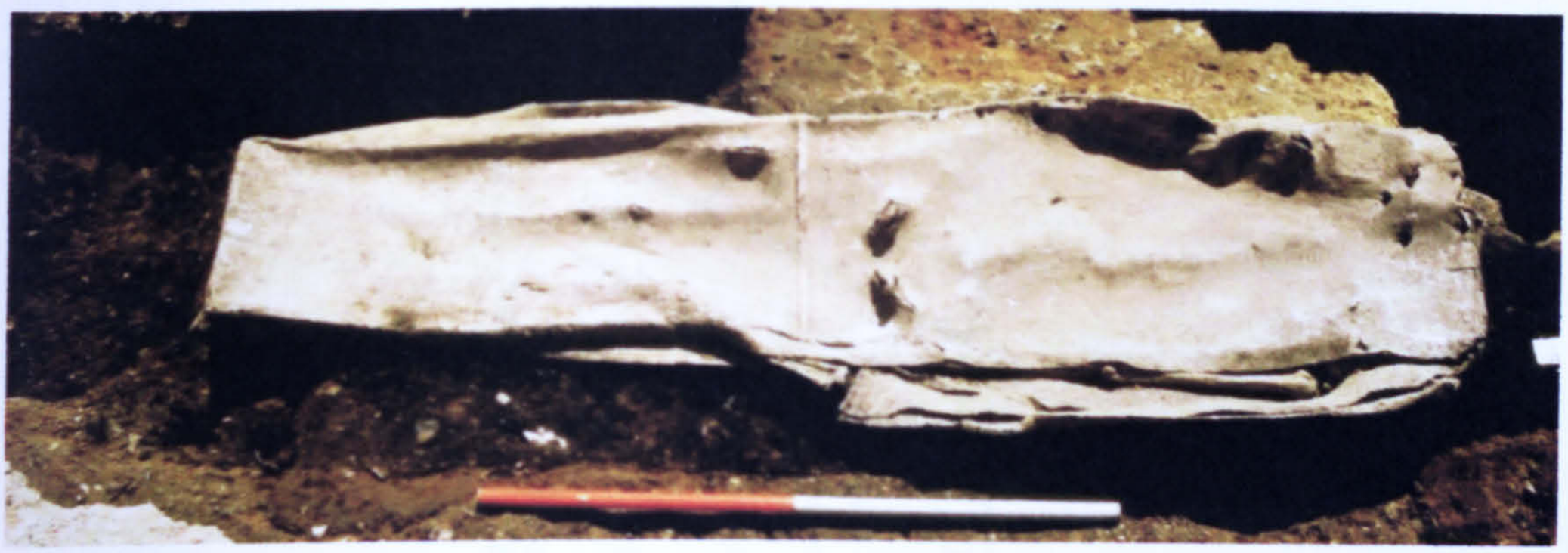

Figure 5.25. The lead coffin with lid removed from the tenth-century grave 546 at Staple Gardens (Ha) (view from south)
(©Winchester Museums Service)

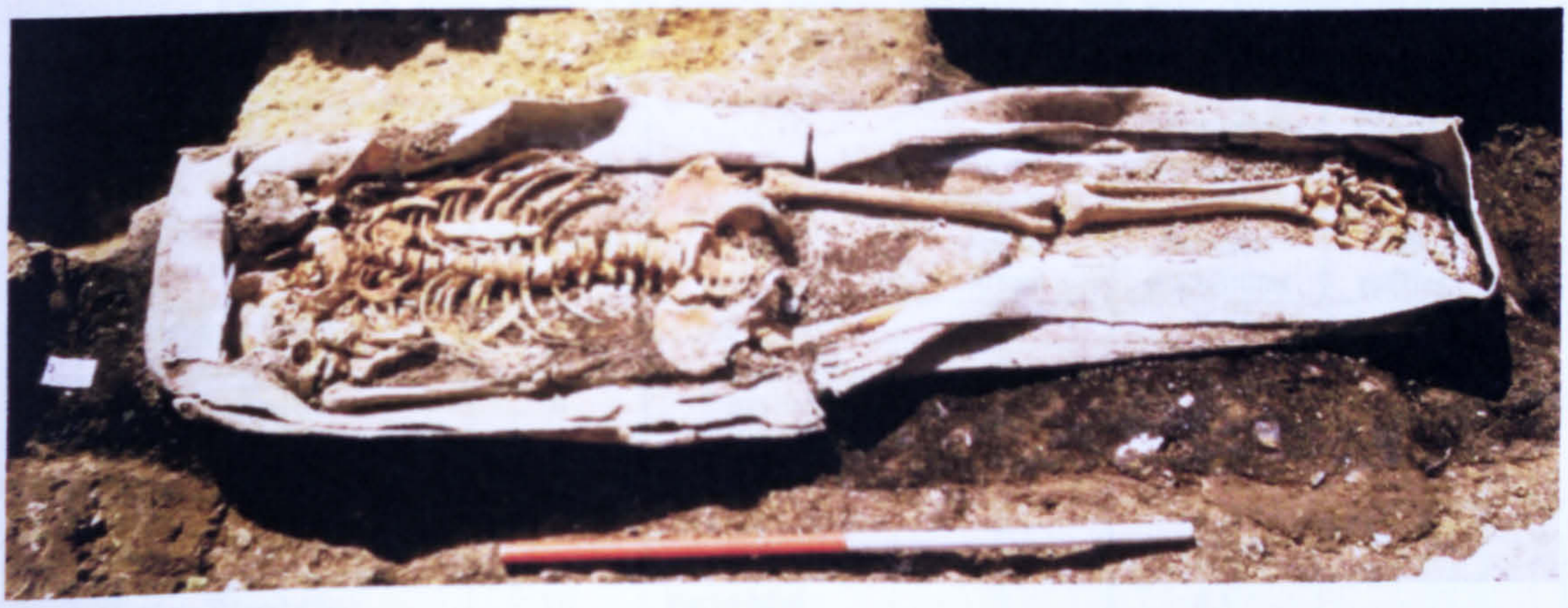

Figure 5.26. Exploded diagram of lead coffin from grave 546 at Staple Gardens
(©Winchester Museums Service)

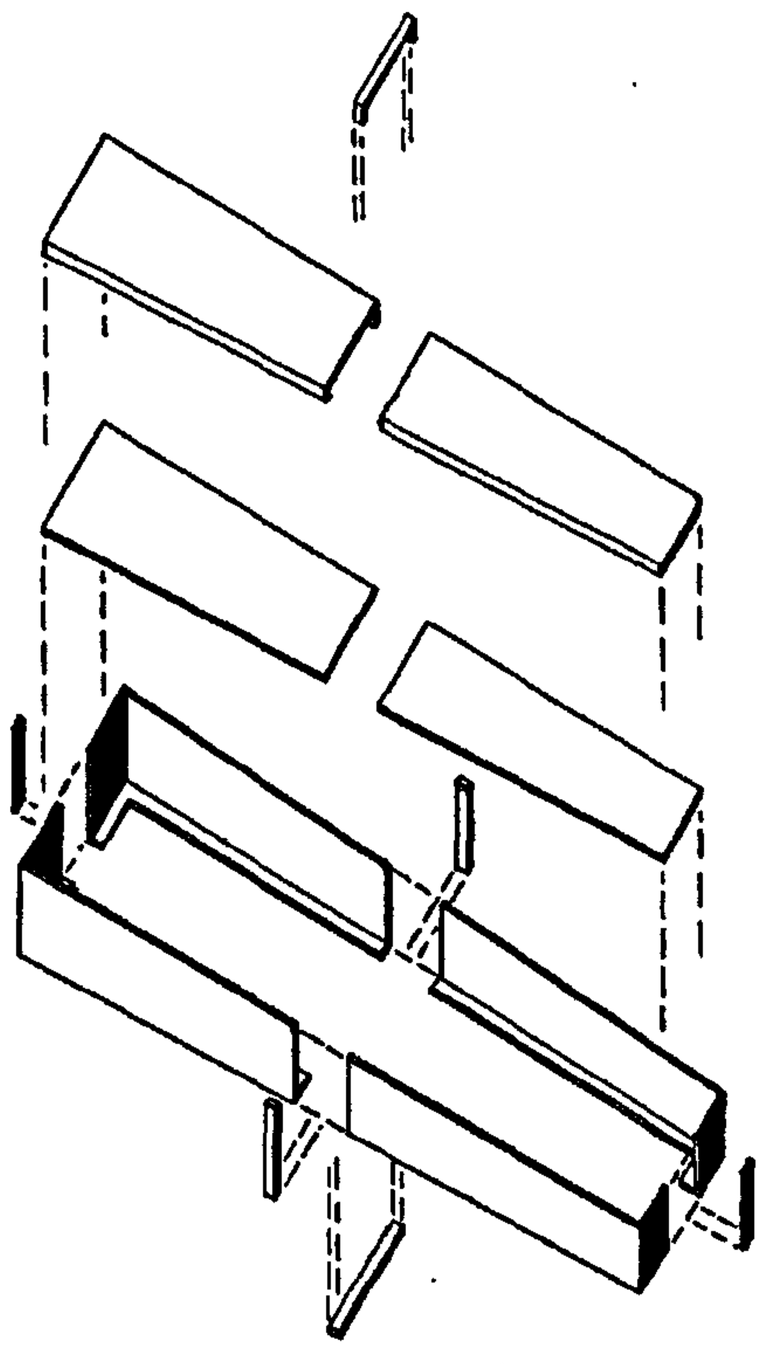

Table 5.13. Distribution of pillow stones burials by site and funerary provision

Site	Number of burials in cemetery	Date	Total no. of burials with pillow stones	Pillow stone burials as a % of cemetery population	Pillow stones burials with	
					Evidence for coffins	Stone linings or coverings
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	105	Late Saxon	17	16.2	4	5
Bath Abbey (So)	31	Late Saxon	6	19.3	1	-
Brean Down (So)	8	Early-Mid Saxon	1	12.5	-	1
Camerton (So)	116	Middle Saxon	2	1.7	-	-
Cannington (So)	55	Middle Saxon	2	3.6	-	1
Cathedral Close (Ha)	1	Late Saxon	1	100.0	-	-
Henley Wood (So)	73	Early-Mid Saxon	3	4.1	-	3
Nunnaminster (Ha)	6	Late Saxon	2	33.3	-	2
Staple Gardens (Ha)	288	Late Saxon	12	4.2	3	-
Temple of Sulis Minerva (So)	15	Late Saxon	1	0.7	-	1
Trowbridge (Wi)	164	Late Saxon	15	9.1	-	4
Wells Cathedral (So)	242	Late Saxon	1	0.4	-	-
Wembdon Hill (So)	12	Mid-Late Saxon	1	8.3	-	-
Winnall II (Ha)	47	Middle Saxon	2	4.2	-	2
Total			66	-	8	19
% of burials with pillow stones					12.1	28.8

single example within the archaeological record is surprising. One possible explanation is that the high levels of disturbance of burials by later generations within the churchyards led to the destruction or recycling of lead coffins. Moreover, it is also possible that many high status burials with lead coffins were interred within churches and subsequently destroyed by later rebuilding programmes.

5.2.5. Pillow stones and footrests

The use, or possible use, of stones or other objects to support the head of the deceased was observed in 66 burials within the study dataset (3.1% of the sample) (figures 5.27 & 5.28). The 66 pillow stone burials were found in 14 cemeteries, where excluding the isolate from Cathedral Close, they amounted to between 0.7 and 33.3% of all burials within the cemetery (table 5.13). The variation in frequency of pillow stones seen is likely to be, in part, a result of variations in local funerary custom. Other contributory factors are likely to include the size of the burial population and the part of the site excavated, as it is unlikely that pillow stones were uniformly distributed within a cemetery. The prevalence of this practice is likely to have been more common than suggested by this data as it is possible that organic materials, which rarely survive in the archaeological record such as wood, plants and textiles, may also have been used to support the head. It has been suggested that dark organic smears of indeterminate origin seen beneath the head of some burials from the late Saxon cemetery at Raunds might represent decayed organic pillows (Boddington 1996:37).[22] It is also possible that soil was used to construct supports around the head (Daniell 1997:180)

Both the number of pillow stones and their position varied considerably within these burials (table 5.14). The most frequent means of supporting the head within these burials was a single item placed to the right of the skull, which was found in the burials of 14 individuals, and two objects placed one either side of the skull, which was observed in 13 individuals. In the case of those burials containing only a single item the possibility that additional stones were present but had been displaced cannot be eliminated, given the high levels of post-burial disturbance seen in many of the cemeteries containing pillow stones. However, it is clear that in many cases only a single stone was placed in the grave. Other methods of supporting the head such as placing an object below the skull or packing stone around the skull were seen less frequently.

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22 There are examples of organic materials being used to support the head within the study area, but none are from securely dated contexts. It has been suggested that the wood shavings found beneath the skulls of a number of undated burials from Glastonbury Abbey may have been the stuffing from pillows (Rathz & Watts 2003 :111), while the lead coffin recovered from Romsey Abbey contained a split log which was used as a head support (Scott 1996:23). The date of the Romsey burial is unclear, but it appears to pre-date the late Saxon abbey (*ibid.*:24)

5.27. Flint nodules used as pillow stones lying within the lead coffin from the tenth-century grave at Staple Gardens
(©Winchester Museums Service)

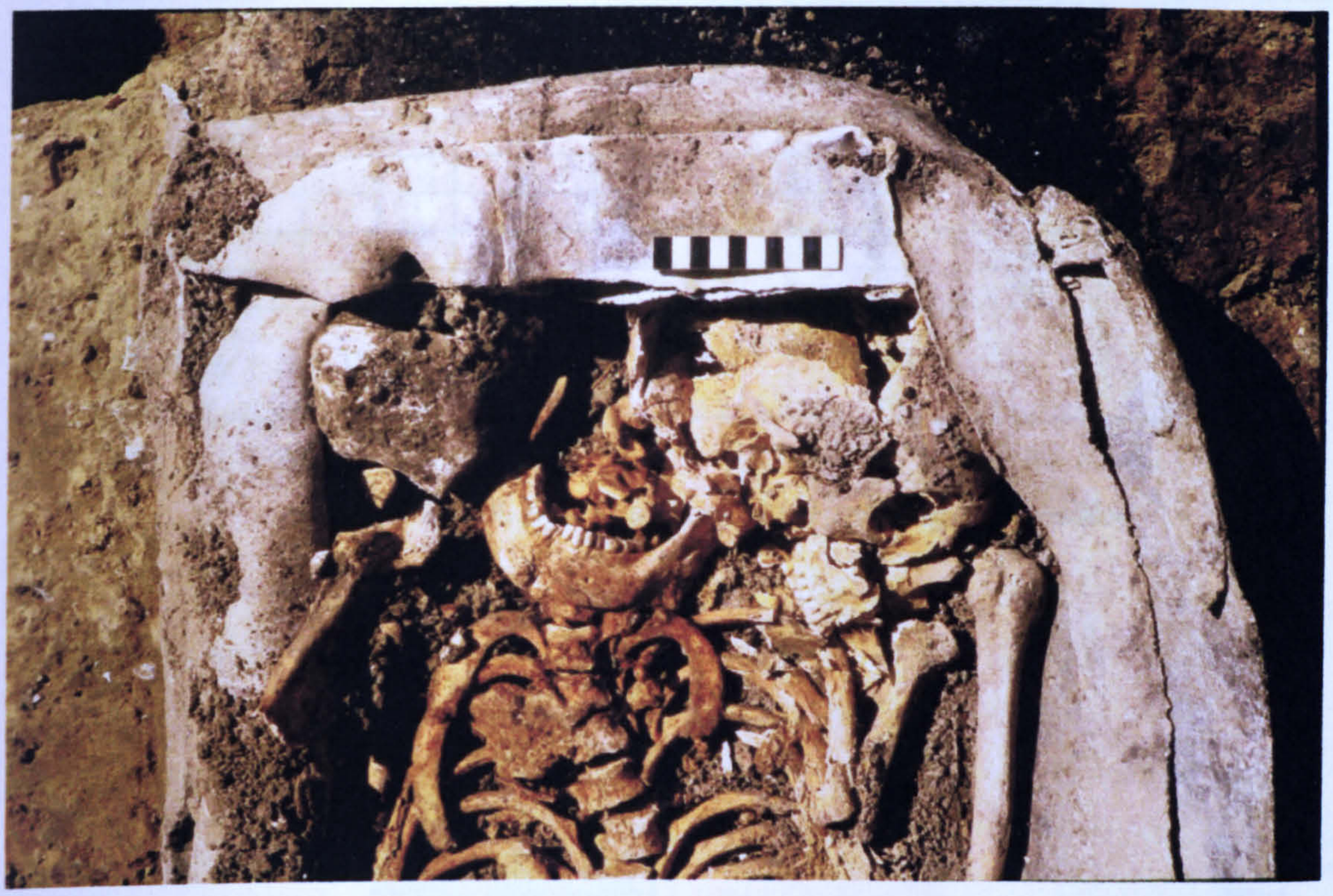


Figure 5.28. Human skulls used as pillow stones in a Norman grave from Trowbridge[i]
(©Trowbridge Museum)

[i] Although a number of late Saxon graves at Trowbridge contained human skulls used as pillow stones, no photographs were available so an example from a later context is used to illustrate the phenomena

Table 5.14. The number and location of pillow stones found in the study sample

Location of pillow stones	Number of pillow stones					% of burials with pillowstones
	1	2	More than 2	Unknown	Total	
Both sides of head	-	13	3	-	16	24.3%
Left of skull	6	-	-	-	6	9.1%
Right of skull	14	3	-	3	20	30.3%
Below head	4	-	-	2	6	9.1%
Other	1	-	6	3	10	15.1%
Unknown	-	-	-	8	8	12.1%
Total	25	16	9	16	66	-
% of burials with pillow stones	37.8%	24.3%	13.6%	24.3%	-	-

Figure 5.29. Distribution of pillow stone by composition

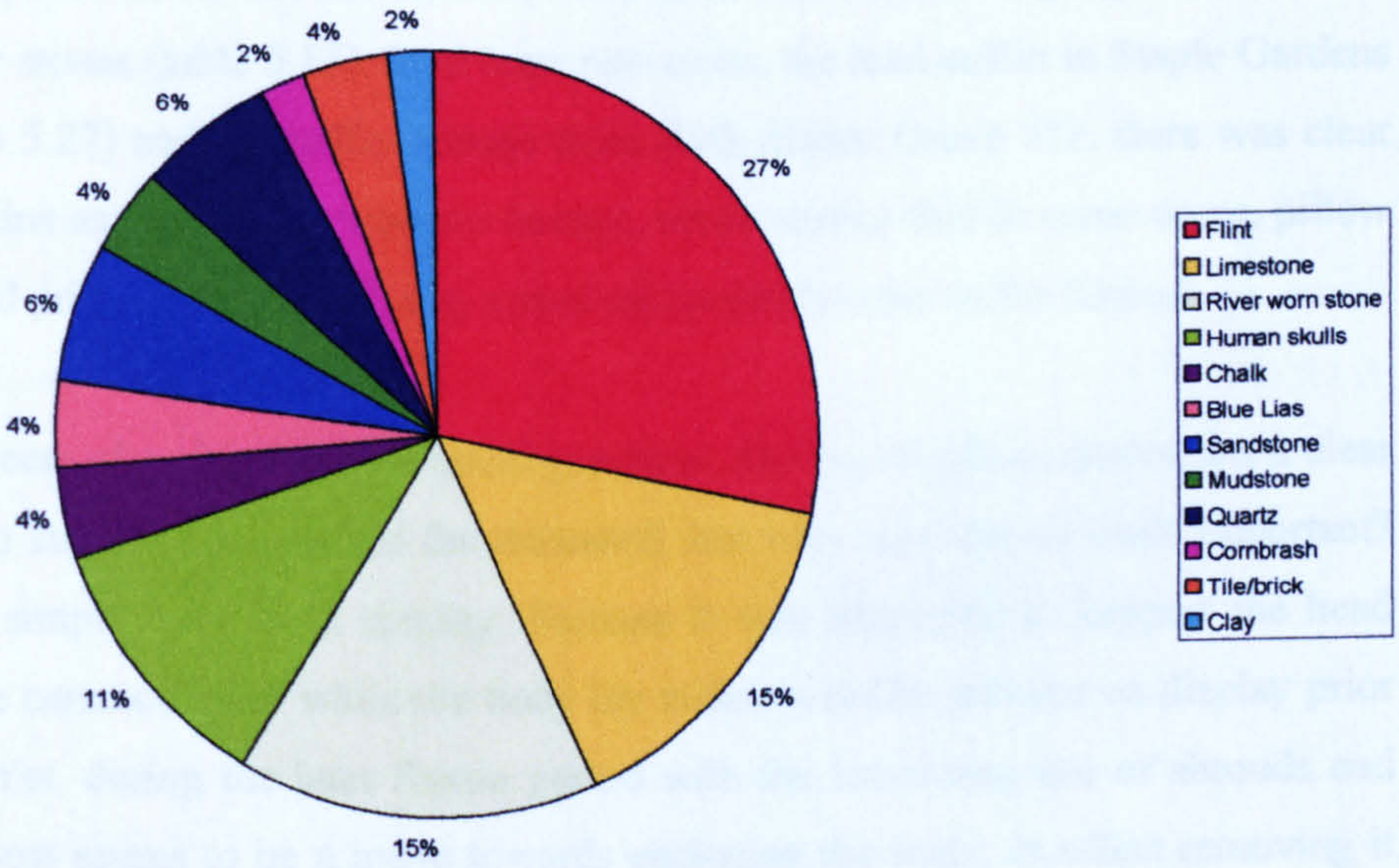
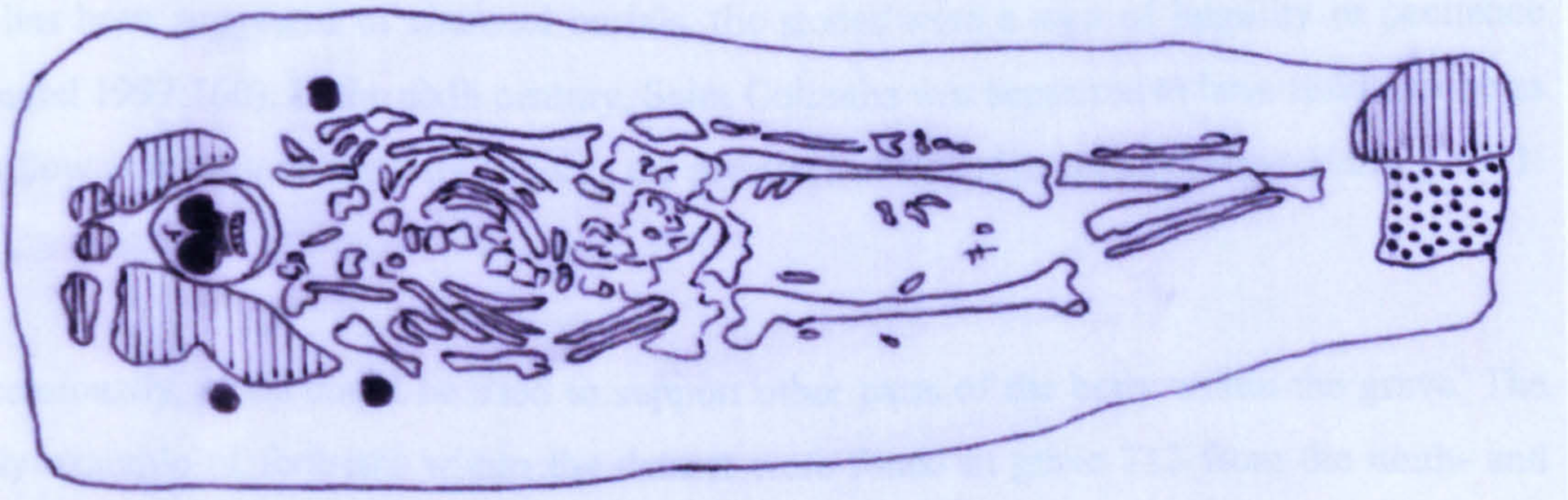


Figure 5.30. The footrest in grave 712 from the ninth-and tenth century cemetery at Bath Abbey



▥-stone, ■-iron, ◪ - impression left by a second stone

(redrawn from excavation plans in Bath Archaeological Trust archive AHC 93 by M. Cherryson).

In 53 burials, the type of material used to support the head was known (figure 5.29). In 90% of these burials, the specific type of stone used usually reflected the underlying geology of the site. For example, flint nodules were found in cemeteries, such as Staple Gardens, which overlay chalk with flints geology, while sandstones were used as pillow stones in a few Somerset sites reflecting the underlying geology of part of that county. The high level of flint and limestone pillow stones seen in the study sample is a reflection of limestone and chalk geology which dominates much of the study area. In some cases, the type of material used was specific to one site. The use of river-worn stones and quartz was only observed at Barnstaple Castle; Blue Lias was found at Bath Abbey, while the use of mudstone, cornbrash and human skulls as pillow stones was only seen at Trowbridge (figure 5.28).[23]

Evidence for the presence of wooden funerary structures was found in eight graves (12.1%) containing pillow stones (table 5.13). In at least two cases, the lead coffin in Staple Gardens grave 546 (figure 5.27) and the coffin fittings from Bath Abbey Grave 712, there was clear evidence for coffins as opposed to wooden linings, which means that in some cases, pillow stones were added prior to the coffin being sealed and possibly prior to the funeral.

Unlike many aspects of early medieval burial practices, the use of pillow stones has a clear functional role to support the head of the deceased, but why was this in itself important? One factor may simply have been display. Perhaps it was important to support the head during grave-side ceremonies or while the body lay within a coffin perhaps on display prior to the funeral. Yet, during the later Saxon period with the increasing use of shrouds and coffins there almost seems to be a move towards enclosing the body, in effect removing it from view and if the body was not on display – why support the head? Another possibility is that it may be linked to the belief in bodily resurrection. Perhaps as the body was raised from the grave on the Day of Judgement it was important to be facing the right way. Alternatively, as has been suggested of charcoal burials, the stones were a sign of humility or penitence (Daniel 1997:160). In the sixth century, Saint Columba was supposed to have used a stone as a pillow as a form of austerity echoing the practices of Egyptian monks (Mayr-Harting 1991: 83).

Occasionally, stone could be used to support other parts of the body within the grave. The only example of footrests within the dataset were found in grave 712 from the ninth- and

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[23] The use of skulls as pillow stones was also seen at in two burials from 4-8 Market Street in Winchester (Ha) (Teague 1988:8). The site was in use from the late tenth to early fourteenth century, but it is not possible to distinguish the late Saxon from the medieval burials.

tenth-century cemetery at Bath Abbey (figure 5.30) (Bath Archaeological Trust archive AHC 93). The footrests, which accompanied the skeleton of an adult male, consisted of one *in situ* stone and the impression of a second stone immediately adjacent to it. The burial was one of the more elaborate burials within the cemetery and also contained pillow stones, a bed of charcoal and evidence for an elaborate coffin in the form of coffin brackets and iron nails.

5.2.6. Evidence for the use of grave coverings in early medieval Wessex

The archaeological evidence suggests that the majority of graves were simply backfilled with earth. Yet on occasion, other materials were incorporated into a grave's backfill, the most common of which was stone. Forty-seven graves (2.1% of dataset) from 13 sites within the study area had some form of stone grave covering. Excluding the isolated burials at Alvediston (Wi) (Meaney 1964:264) and Frilford II (Bk) (Bradford & Goodchild 1939:37), the frequency of stone coverings at these sites ranged between 0.6 and 33.3% of burials (table 5.15). The exceptionally high frequencies of stone coverings seen at the Nunnaminster (Ha) and Stoneage Barton (So) may be due to the small number of burials recovered from both sites. Within the study sample, stone coverings are much rarer than stone linings, which are found in 6.7% of the dataset.[24] However, this, in part, may be the result of the vagaries of survival in the archaeological record rather than differences in incidence of the two funerary practices. The very location of stone coverings above the body makes them more likely to be disturbed by later activities, such as ploughing, construction work or by subsequent grave-digging than stones below or to the side of the inhumation. Moreover, fragments of funerary sculpture are known to have been used in later structures [25] and it is possible that a similar fate befell the unadorned and undressed stone used above some graves. There was considerable variation seen in the use of stone as part of grave coverings within the study area. As such for the purposes of comparison, all graves with some form of stone covering were placed into one of the three categories listed in table 5.16.

The most common category in the study involved the placing of a few stones over the body, and was found in 20 graves (42.6% of burials with stone covered graves) (table 5.15 & figure 5.31). There was significant variation in the position and number of stones within this category. In some cases, there was only a single stone placed over the body, such as the stone lying over the skull of the burial in grave 16 at Camerton (So) (Horne 1928:66), the large flint placed over the centre of the chest of the inhumation in grave 8 at Winnall II (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:11), or the stone over the feet of the skeleton in grave 218 from

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[24] Few graves in the dataset have with both stone linings and stones covers (table 5.17).
[25] See chapter 6 for details.

Table 5.15. Distribution of stone grave coverings by site

Site	Date	Number of burials	Type of stone cover				% of stone covers in cemetery
			Few stones above body	Partial covering	Stone cover	All	
Henley Wood (So)	5th-7th century	73	-	1	-	1	1.4%
Camerton (So)	Middle Saxon	116	4	1	-	5	4.3%
Stoneage Barton (So)	7th century	5	1		-	1	20.0%
Winnall II (Ha)	7th century	47	4	2	-	6	12.8%
Monkton Deverill (Wi)	7th-8th century	15	-	1	-	1	6.7%
Ulwell (Do)	7th century	55	-	2	2	4	7.3%
Alvediston (Wi)	7th century	1	-	1	-	1	100%
Frilford II (Ox)	7th-8th century	1	-	-	1	1	100%
Wells Cathedral (So)	Mid-late Saxon	242	-	2	10	12	4.9%
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	105	9	-	-	9	8.6%
Bath Abbey (So)	Late Saxon	31	-	1	-	1	3.2%
Nunnaminister (Ha)	Late Saxon	6	2	-	-	2	33.3%
Trowbridge (Wi)	10th-12th century	164	1	-	-	1	0.6%
Total			21	11	13	45	-
% of graves with covers			46.7%	24.4%	28.9%	-	-

Figure 5.31. Frequency of categories of stone grave covering within the study area[i]

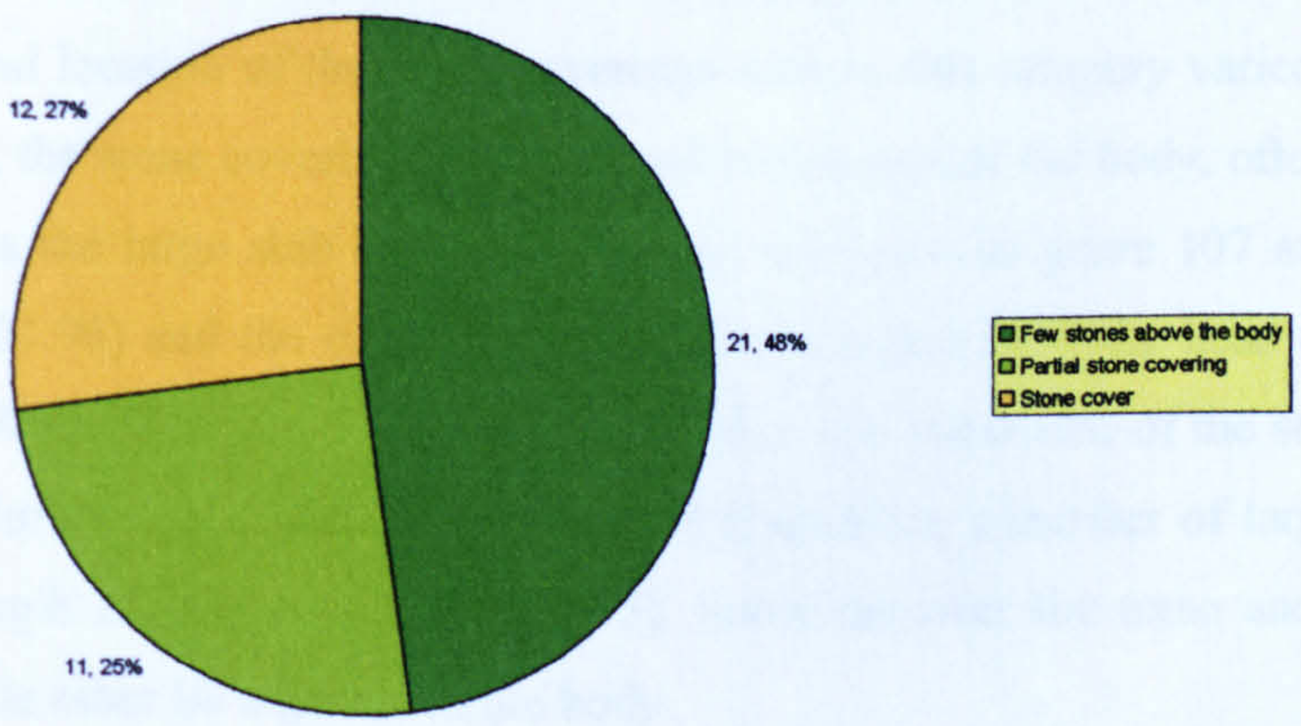

Table 5.16. Categories used in analysing stone coverings within the dataset.

Category	Description
Few stones over body	Few stones placed over body.
Partial stone covering	Body partially covered by stones
Complete stone covering	All of surviving grave covered by stone

[i] Data labels on chart give number of examples, followed by the percentage.

the Nunnaminster (Ha) (Winchester Museums Service archive AVG93). Other graves contained several stones, for example the skeleton in grave 12 at Winnall II, which had a large flint over the feet and two more flints on the right femur, close to the knee (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:12). Some of the examples from this category, all from Barnstaple contain large numbers of small stones in the form of quartz and river-worn pebbles which were scattered over the body or coffin (Miles 1986b:66).[26]

When only a few stones lay above a burial it is not always easy to determine whether they were purposefully placed above the burial or accidentally incorporated when the grave was backfilled (Stoodley 1999a:60). It could perhaps be argued that stones, placed above the head and torso, were indicative of a greater level of human involvement, but this supposition is tentative at best. There is a real possibly that the stone found above at least some of the graves in this category may be the result of stone displaced when the grave was dug, simply being incorporated when the grave was backfilled. One cemetery where the stones appear to have been purposefully incorporated is Barnstaple. The quartz found in a number of graves at Barnstaple originated from deposits, which underlay the cemetery, and could be considered to be accidental inclusions. Yet, the natural outer surface of the quartz is a weathered yellow-brown and the blocks had been split to expose unweathered white surfaces before addition to the graves (Miles 1986b:66), suggesting a degree of intent.

Twelve burials (25.5% of burials with stone covered graves) had a partial stone covering. The extent and location of the stone coverings seen in this category varied considerably. In many graves, the stone covering was confined to just part of the body, often the head and/or torso, such as the large slab covering the head and torso in grave 107 at Wells Cathedral (Rodwell 2001:96) and the six flints arranged in a square over the head of both burials in grave 24 at Winnall (figure 5.32). In other graves, the placement of the stones appears less systematic. For example, grave 25 at Winnall II contains a number of large flints scattered along the length of the grave (figure 5.33). Some lay over the torso and right leg of the skeleton, while other lie adjacent to the body.

The final group of 15 graves (31.9% of graves with stone covers) had some type of complete stone covering. In some graves, this took the form of a layer of stones placed above the body, as at Camerton (So) in grave 23 (Horne 1928:68). Alternatively, the covering over the body could consist of a single slab of stone, like the stone grave cover mortared in place over grave 152 at Wells Cathedral (So) (Rodwell 2001:67) (figure 5.11), or a number of slabs, as

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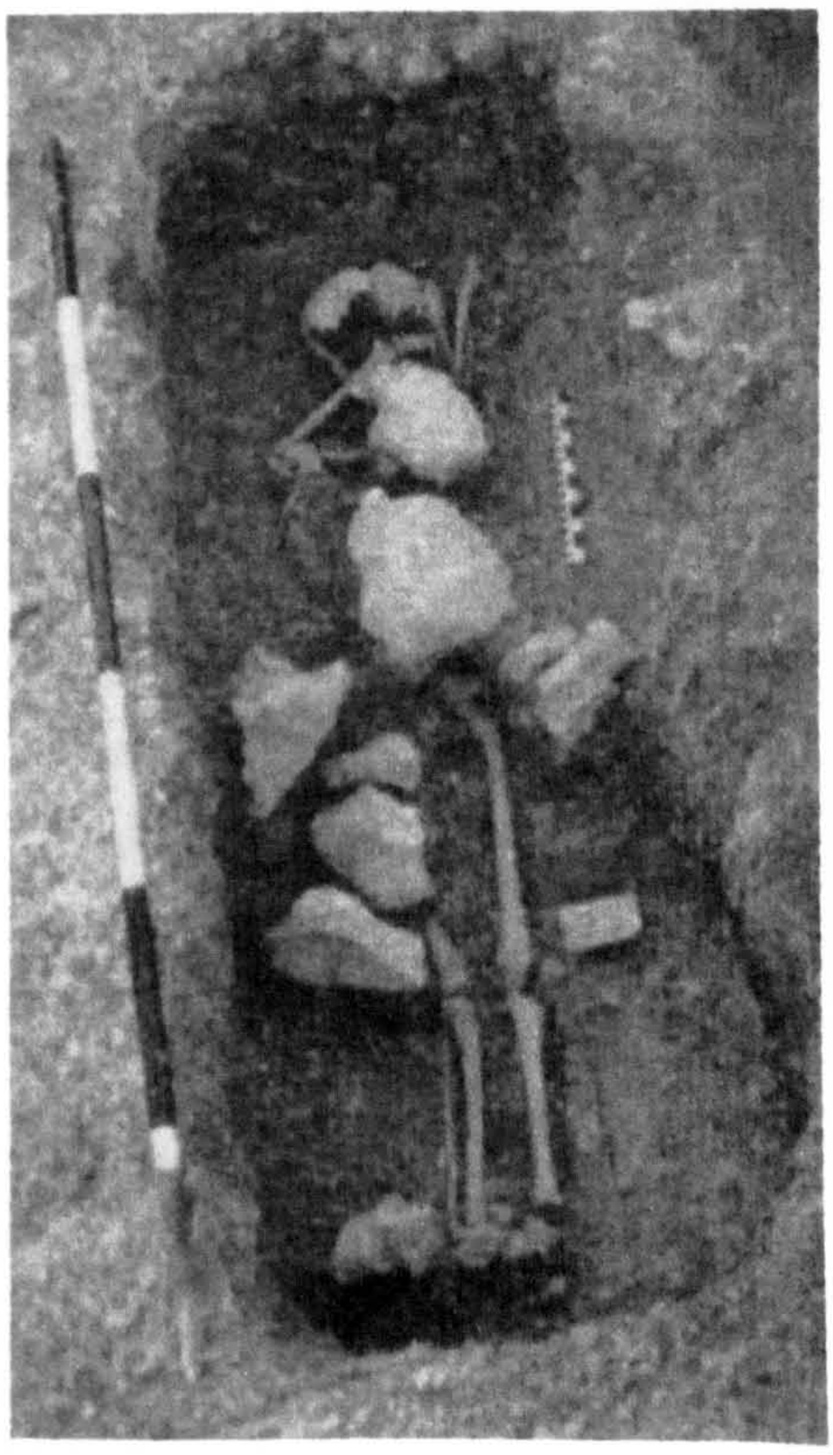
[26] Quartz was included in burials from Capel Malog (Jones 1988:27)and Kellington (Mytum 1993:16), although the significance of their use in funerary practices is far from clear (Daniell 1997:165).

Figure 5.32. Six large flints arranged in a square over the heads and upper torsos of the two skeletons in grave 24 from the seventh-century cemetery of Winnall II(Ha).
(from Meaney & Hawkes 1970-plate I – figure B)

Figure 5.33. A child's skeleton covered with large flints in grave 25 from Winnall II (Ha).
(from Meaney & Hawkes 1970-plate I – figure C)



seen in grave 77 in the same cemetery (*ibid.*:106). With some of the slab covered graves, it is unclear as to whether the stone coverings were visible above ground or covered in soil. Complete and fragments of carved stone grave covers are known from the study area and these were clearly designed to be displayed above ground.[27] It is possible that some of the unadorned undressed stone slabs seen above a number of graves in study sample provided a less expensive means of fulfilling a similar function.

Stone was not the only material used to cover the grave and alternative materials were used to cover four graves within the study sample (table 5.18). Grave 5139 from Tolpuddle Ball contained chalk rubble packed above and around the sides of a coffin (Hearne & Birbeck 1999:59 & 247; Dorset County Museum Archive 1999.86.3.1.719/1-2). Another two burials had been backfilled with contrasting earth. In Grave 75 at Barnstaple Castle (Dv), a darker clay had been used which contrasted with the natural (Barnstaple Museum Barnstaple Castle Archive), while grave OB 11 at Exeter Cathedral (Dv) had been filled with a fine black soil distinct from the natural and not seen in other graves (Royal Prince Albert Museum Exeter Cathedral Archive). In addition to these four burials, it seems likely that wooden planks were probably used to cover the body in a number of graves within the study area. However, the incidence of this practice is impossible to determine due to the problems inherent in the survival of wood in the archaeological record. There is evidence from a number of graves at Wells Cathedral suggestive of the presence of wooden covers over the body (Rodwell 2001:71).[28] It has also been suggested that some stone linings, particularly when both long sides of the grave were lined, may have been used to support wooden planks above the body (Boddington 1996:40). Another type of stone and timber arrangement was seen in grave 2625 from Trowbridge, which had a layer of cornbrash rubble packed around the head and upper torso of the corpse with a plank of wood, traces of which were found in the grave, then laid above the body (figure 5.34) (Graham & Davies 1993:41).

The use of grave coverings has been seen as performing a series of primarily protective functions. Stone and wooden coverings shielded the body or parts of the body from the earthen grave fill and also protected the body from being disturbed (Boddington 1996:38). Given the high levels of intercutting seen in many late Saxon cemeteries, there was a real threat that the body would be disturbed by later graves.[29] Stones placed above the body, even

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[27] See discussion in chapter 6

[28] Rodwell has argued that the level of post-depositional movement seen in a number of graves could only occur if the body decayed in a void and has drawn attention to a narrow grave with rounded ends (2001:71). No conventional coffin would fit this grave and there is no evidence for a stone cover for this grave. Yet the post-depositional movement of the skeleton suggests the body decayed in a void, thus there must have been some form of grave cover. Rodwell suggests that a wooden grave cover may be the most likely explanation.

[29] See section 4.4. for a discussion of the evidence for the post-burial of the dead within the study area.

Table 5.17. Graves with stone linings and stone coverings.

Type of stone grave lining	Type of stone cover		
	Few stones over body	Partially covered	Stone grave cover
Few stones	2	-	-
Partially lined	-	4	1
Complete lining	-		3

Figure 5.34. Stone packing around the head and over the upper torso of the skeleton in grave 2625 from Trowbridge.
(from Graham & Davies 1993:41).

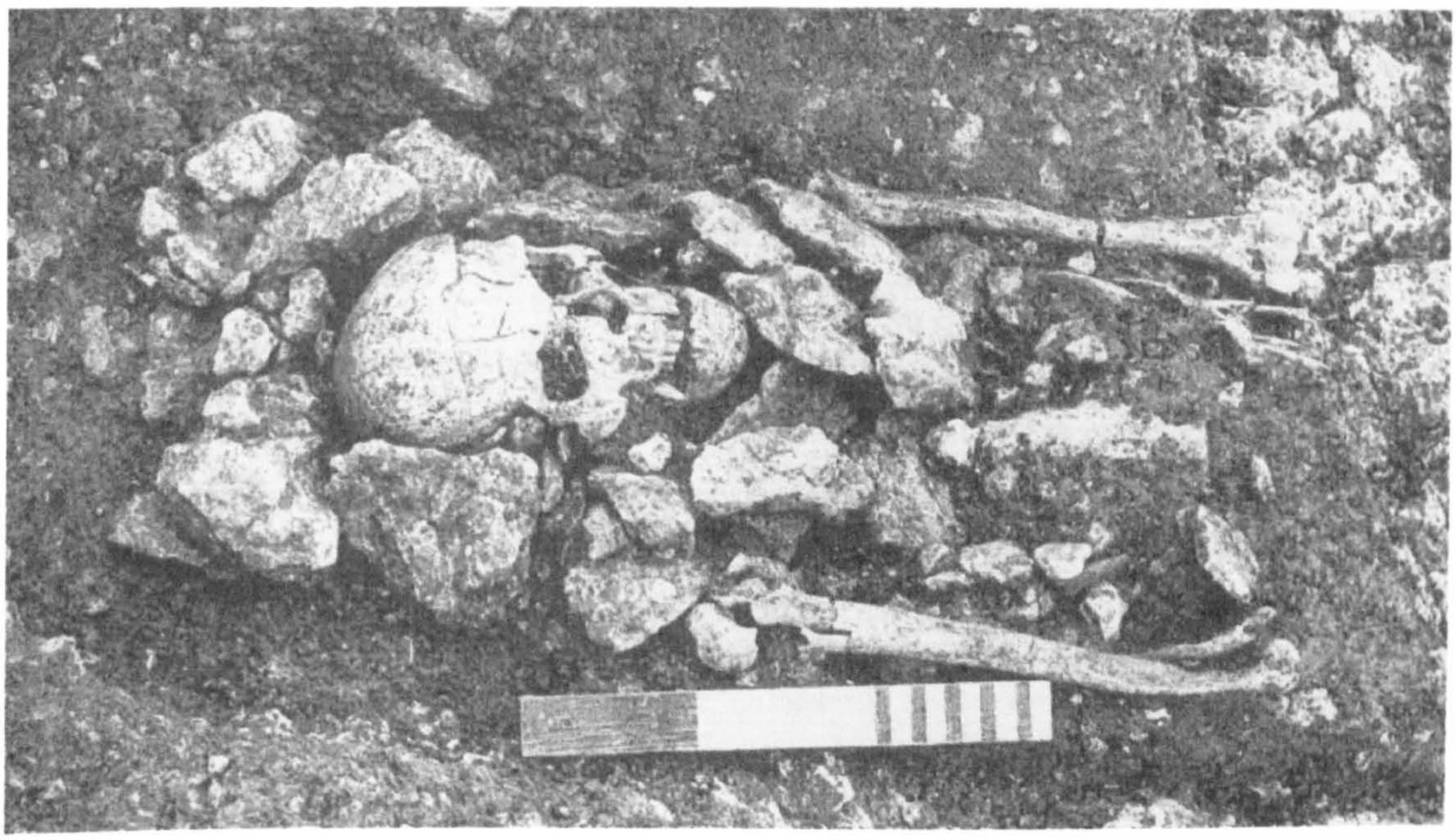

Table 5.18. Non-masonry grave covers identified in the study sample.

Site	Date	Grave No.	Type of cover	Sex of occupant	Age of occupant
Tolpuddle Ball (Do)	3rd-7th century	5139[i]	Chalk rubble	Female	Mature Adult
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	75	Dark earth	Male?	Adult
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Middle-late Saxon	OB 11	Dark earth	Male	Old Adult

[i] Burial radiocarbon dated to 1450±30 BP (Hearn & Birbeck 1999:58), calibrated using OxCal to 540-660AD at 2σ level of confidence.

if not visible on the surface, could serve to alert grave-diggers that a body lay below, although whether this would necessarily prevent the body being disturbed was another matter (Thompson 2004:123). The use of different coloured soils or chalk would, also serve to warn of the presence of a body below. Humans may not have been the only threat to the bodies of the deceased. Complaints are known from the medieval period of animals getting into churchyards, potentially disturbing the dead (Daniell 1997:123) and it seems unlikely this problem was unique to the medieval period.[30] As such, stones placed above the body may have provided protection against scavengers. Stones may also have protected the living from the dead. Finally, it has been suggested that the large flints placed over a number of the burials in the Winnall II cemetery were to confine the ghost of the deceased to the grave (Meaney & Hawkes 1970:31).

5.3. Chronological variation in grave type and grave furnishing

The period 600-1100AD saw both continuity and change in the nature of grave elaboration and this is summarised in table 5.19. Some grave types and grave variations are found throughout the study period, while other practices present in the seventh century virtually disappeared as others emerged.

5.3.1. Continuity in grave type and grave variations in early medieval Wessex, 600-1100AD

Stone lined graves, stone covers, wooden funerary structures and the use of stones to support the skull are found throughout the study period (table 5.19), although it is important to note that continuity of form does not necessarily reflect a continuity in function or meaning. There is no strong evidence for any chronological variation in the use of stone linings or stone coverings. There is a slight suggestion that the incidence of stone lined graves may have been more prevalent during the middle Saxon period, but this may simply reflect the greater number of cemeteries dating from the seventh-and eighth-centuries in Somerset and Dorset, areas with a higher incidence of stone lined graves.[31] Although evidence for the use of wooden funerary structures was found throughout the study period, the majority of examples were found in later Saxon contexts (table 5.10). While this may in part be the result of high levels of timber structures in a few large late Saxon sites or simply the result of the vagaries of preservation, the data may indicate an increased level of wooden lining/coffin

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[30] The theme of the body as carrion for scavengers, such as ravens and wolves, is found in a number of late Saxon homilies, poems and images (Thompson 2004:137-8)
[31] Geographical variations in the distribution of grave types and grave variations are discussed below.

Table 5.19. Chronological distribution of types of grave elaboration within the study area

Grave type	Grave variation	Chronological distribution within the study area
Ledges in graves	Grave goods Bed burials	Found primarily in middle Saxon period
Head recesses	Charcoal burials Coffin fittings	Found primarily in later Saxon period
–	Wooden structures Pillow stones	Found throughout the study period but in increased levels in the later Saxon period
Stone linings	Stone coverings	Found throughout the study period

Table 5.20. Grave goods from burials from the Minster cemeteries in Winchester[i].

Minster	Grave Number	Date of grave	Object in grave
Old Minster	796	Early ninth century	Writing lead
	341	Early to mid-ninth century	Silver pin
	67	Mid-to late ninth century	Pair of silver hooked tags
	321	Mid-tenth century	Strap end
	842	Early eleventh century	Iron key
New Minster	36	Early to mid-tenth century	Iron key
	56	Early to mid eleventh century	Bronze buckle

Table 5.22. Radiocarbon dated charcoal burials within the study area.

Cemetery	Grave	Material sampled	Date at 2σ
Bath Abbey	299	Human bone	770-975 AD
	2010	Human bone	685-950 AD
	710	Human bone	785-975 AD
Romsey Abbey	5119	Charcoal	680-1010 AD
	3120	Charcoal	830-1155 AD
	5127	Charcoal	780-1030 AD
Staple Gardens	546	Human bone	890-995 AD

Table 5.23. Geographical distribution of types of grave elaboration within the study area

Grave type	Grave variation	Geographical distribution within the study area
Stone lined grave	Stone grave covers	Found primarily in the western part of the study area
–	Grave goods	Found primarily in eastern part of the study area
Ledges Head Niches	Bed burials	Uncommon funerary practices confined to a few cemeteries
Charcoal burials	Coffins Pillow stones Coffin fittings	Found throughout the study area

[i] This list of items found in graves at the Old and New Minster in Winchester was complied from the catalogue of small items in Biddle 1990b; Biddle & Brown 1990; Goodall 1990a; Hinton 1990a, b & c. The list does not include items found in grave fills or the iron arrowhead found embedded in a vertebra in grave 124 (Goodall 1990b:1073). A complete list of grave goods will only be available on the publication of the final excavation report.

use in the later Saxon period. It is possible that that there were also chronological variations in the type of timber structure within the grave, but this is masked by the poor levels of timber preservation through much of the study area. The use of stones to support the skull exhibits a similar chronological distribution as wooden funerary structures. 56 (83.3%) of the burials containing pillow stones in this study are found in cemeteries in use during the late Saxon period (table 5.13) and this suggests that this practice, while not originating during this period, seems to have seen an increase in popularity.

5.3.2. Changes in grave type and grave variations in early medieval Wessex, 600-1100AD

The practice of furnished burial is known to have declined during the middle Saxon period (Geake 1997:125) and this is reflected in the chronological distribution of cemeteries containing grave goods within the study area (table 5.8). Fifty-eight sites (90.6% of sites with grave goods) were in use during the seventh and eighth century. The seventh and eighth centuries saw marked changes in both the composition of grave good assemblages found accompanying burials and in the numbers of furnished burials (*ibid.*:129). In comparison to grave good assemblages of the fifth and sixth centuries, those of the seventh and eighth centuries, in general, contain fewer objects (Geake 1992:84). Furthermore, the repertoire of grave goods from which these objects were drawn differed significantly from those seen in furnished burials of the fifth and sixth centuries. The difference is most marked in female burials with the brooches and long bead necklaces found in many fifth- and sixth-century burials being replaced by assemblages with simpler necklaces of small monochrome beads, or gold and silver pendants, pins and chatelaines (*ibid.*:85). The differences in male burial assemblages were less marked, although the middle Saxon period saw the increasing numbers of seaxes deposited in graves, while the use of arrowheads and axes as grave goods declined (Härke 1992:159). This was combined with a decline in the overall numbers of weapon burials during the seventh and eighth centuries (*ibid.*:160).

The first decades of the eighth century are thought to have seen the virtual abandonment of furnished burial (Geake 1997:125). This is echoed within the dataset with only nine of the sixty-four cemeteries containing furnished burials in the study sample (14.1%) being in use later than the end of the eighth century (table 5.21). Moreover, only five of these had graves thought to date from later than the mid-eighth century that contained items that could be construed as grave goods. While included within the table, the items found in the graves at Staple Gardens (Ha), probably represent the accidental inclusion of material disturbed from underlying Roman deposits rather than items consciously included with the burial. However,

Table 5.21. Grave goods found in late-eighth to late eleventh-century graves within the study sample.

Site	Date of site	Grave number	Age and sex of occupant	Grave goods	Date of grave	Basis of dating
Bevis Grave, Ha	7th -10th century	59	Adult	Knife	890-1020AD	Radiocarbon
		12	Adult female	Strap end	9th century	Grave goods
Reading II, Bk	Late 8th century	N/A	Unknown	Sword, horse skeleton	Late 8th century	Grave goods
Sonning, Bk	Late 9th -10th century	N/A	Unknown	Sword, arrowheads, knife, bronze pin & iron fragment	Late 9th-10th century	Grave goods
Westgate, Ha	Late 9th -11th century	3420	Unknown	Knife	895-1025AD	Radiocarbon
Exeter Cathedral, Dv	Mid-late Saxon	OB 2	Elderly male	Gold ring	9th century?	Grave goods
Staple Gardens, Ha	9th to 11th century	225	Adult male	3 coins	-	-
		228	Adult male	Coin	-	-
		233	Adult male	Coin, copper alloy object	-	-
		241	Child	Iron object	-	-
		274	Adult male	Coin	-	-
		293	Adult female	2 coins	-	-
		295	Child	3 metal objects	-	-
		327	Adult male	Coin	-	-
		331	Adult female	Coin	-	-
		369	Adult female	Coin	-	-
		393	Infant	Coin	-	-
		541	Adult male	Coin	-	-
Old Dairy Cottage, Ha	8th-10th century	109	Unknown	Buckle	-	-
		110A	Adult, possibly female	Animal long bone	-	-
		111	Adult male	Animal rib	-	-
		123	Adult male	Buckle	775-965AD	Radiocarbon
Stockbridge Down, Ha	Late Saxon	14	Unknown	Bronze rivets	-	-
		19	Unknown	6 coins, decapitated dog	Possibly 11th century	Coins
		24	Unknown	Hook or wrist fastener	-	-
		28	Unknown	Buckle,	-	-
		31	Unknown	Buckle,	-	-
		32	Adult	Buckle,	-	-
		37	Unknown	Sheep skull	-	-
		38	Unknown	Buckle	-	-
Meon Hill, Ha	Mid-late Saxon	4	Adult male	Wrist fastener, earring	-	-
		5	Adult male	Chape or strap tag. Coin, buckle	Possibly 11th century	Coin
		7	Adult male	Buckle	-	-
		9	Adult	Earring,	-	-

the position of a few of the coins within the grave, particularly by the hands or on the skull, may be indicative of a degree of human involvement in the placement of the disturbed objects. Likewise, many of the items accompanying the burials from the execution cemeteries at Old Dairy Cottage (Ha), Meon Hill (Ha) and Stockbridge Down (Ha) should be seen as unconsciously rather than deliberately deposited. These cemeteries are thought primarily to contain the bodies of those executed for criminal activities and excluded from burial in consecrated ground (Reynolds 1999a:105) and are characterised by the lack of care shown in the disposal of the remains of the deceased. Shrouds are unlikely to have been used at such sites with bodies most likely deposited into the grave in the clothes they wore when they died, which may explain the presence of buckles, wrist fasteners and other metal-work accompanying a number of burials from these sites (table 5.21). This, however, does not explain the coins and animal bones which accompanied a few of the burials in these cemeteries. In some cases, such as the isolated rib and long bone found in graves 110A and 111 at Old Dairy Cottage, the animal bones may represent accidental inclusions. However, other examples such as the skeleton of a decapitated dog buried with the decapitated individual in grave 19 at Stockbridge Down were deliberately deposited in the grave (Hill 1937:254), perhaps, it has been suggested, as a punishment for bestiality (Reynolds 1999a:105). This grave also contains six late Saxon coins, which like the coin in grave 5 at Meon Hill, may represent accidental inclusions or may have had a symbolic function, possibly linked to the judicial process.

Outside the execution cemeteries, definite examples of late Saxon graves containing grave goods are rare in Wessex with the dataset producing only six examples (table 5.21). In four of these burials, the grave goods take the form of small personal items. Grave 12 at Bevis Grave (Ha) has a bronze strap end on the proximal right tibia (Rudkin 2001:8), which was dated stylistically to the ninth century (*ibid.*:26), while the burial in grave 59 from the same cemetery, which has been radiocarbon dated to 890-1020AD[32], has a knife beneath the left radius. A second knife from a late Saxon burial (radiocarbon dated to 895-1025AD[33]) was found in grave 3420 from Westgate, Ha.[34] This has important implications for the current ideas on the decline in the use of grave goods during the early medieval period as the knives in these graves may indicate the persistence of grave goods, albeit at relatively low levels, much later than generally thought. It is notable that none of the examples of furnished late Saxon graves discussed above are from ecclesiastical contexts, yet there is one example

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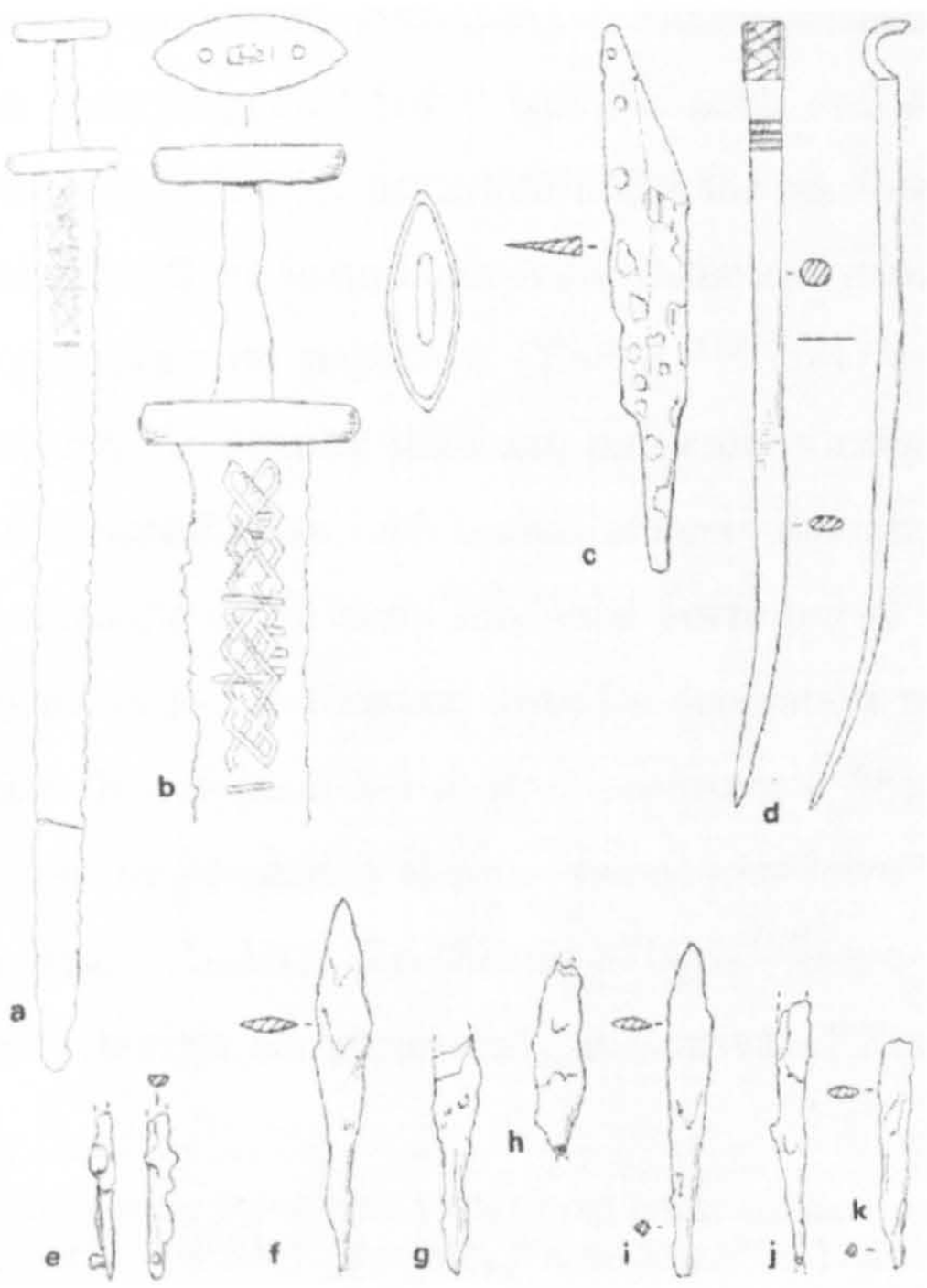
[32] Date given at 2 sigma level of confidence. Radiocarbon dates obtained as part of a radiocarbon dating programme conducted as part of this research. More details are given in chapter 3.
[33] See note above
[34] The two tenth-century burials containing knives demonstrate the value of radiocarbon dating early medieval burials. Without the dates, both burials would probably have been assumed to have been of seventh- or eighth-century date, which has important implications for the dating of early medieval cemeteries.

Figure 5.35. The Burial OB 2 from Exeter cathedral interred with a gold ring to the left of the skeleton's right humerus
(©Exeter Archaeological Unit)

Figure 5.36. Grave goods accompanying the isolated burials from Sonning (Bk)
(from Evison 1969:331)



a & b – sword; c – knife; d – pin; iron fragment; f to k –arrowheads

within the study sample found within a churchyard. The gold ring lying close to the upper right arm of the skeleton in grave OB 2 at Exeter Cathedral (Dv) appears to have been deliberately deposited (figure 5.35) (Graham-Campbell 1982). The precise dating of the ring, and thus the burial, is problematic as it has no direct parallels among either Roman or Anglo-Saxon rings, although many of its characteristics are closer to ninth-century Anglo-Saxon rings than those from the early Anglo-Saxon or Roman periods (*ibid.*). The Exeter burial is not the only churchyard burial containing grave goods in Wessex. A number of burials from the Old and New Minsters at Winchester (Ha), sites not included within the study sample, contained grave goods (table 5.20). Items from the graves included a writing lead (Biddle & Brown 1990:746), a silver pin (Biddle 1990b:555), a matching pair of silver hooked tags (Hinton 1990c:549) and a strap-end (Hinton 1990a:498).

The majority of objects recovered from later Saxon graves can be categorised as small personal items. This is not the case in the isolated burials from Reading II (Bk) and Play Hatch, Sonning (Ox). The single burials from Reading was accompanied by a late eighth-century sword and a horse's skeleton (East 1986:6) while the remains of two skeletons from Play Hatch, Sonning, were found with a sword, arrowheads, a knife, a bronze pin and an iron fragment (figure 5.36) (Evison 1969). These graves are often seen as the most southerly of the group of so-called "Viking" burials (Richards 2000:142-3).[35] With the exception of the Reading example, the "Viking" burials lie north of the Thames with many found in areas that were under Scandinavian control (Halsall 2000:265).[36] The presence of grave goods in these burials in a period when unaccompanied burial was the norm and the tendency to equate grave goods with paganism has led to the assumption that the occupants of such graves had Scandinavian connections. Yet there is no evidence that the early medieval church viewed furnished burial as synonymous with paganism (Young 1999:74) or even that the use of grave goods could necessarily be equated with any particularly religious affiliation (Ucko 1969:274; James 1989:26). Nonetheless, both burials are very distinctive and the Reading II burial contains the only example of an early medieval horse burial within the study area. Moreover, the closest parallels to the Reading sword's decoration are Scandinavian (East 1986:4-5). It may be that this atypical burial *does* represent a Scandinavian presence in Berkshire (*ibid.*:6), although the possibility that the sword may have been obtained through trade cannot be eliminated. Unlike the Reading burial, none of the grave goods accompanying the Sonning burials are necessarily indicative of Scandinavian influences.

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[35] It has been suggested the human bones found with a late Saxon bridle and deer antlers found on Silbury Hill may also be a Viking burial (Evison 1969:335). However, it is unclear if the bridle and the human bones were recovered from the same part of Silbury Hill (*ibid.*), or if they were necessarily contemporary (Pollard & Reynolds 2002:227).

[36] Sonning lies in that part of Berkshire north of the Thames.

Although common in "Viking" graves in the British Isles, the "Celtic" ring-headed pin is not Scandinavian in origin (Evison 1969:330), while the inlaid blade of the sword may possibly have been of English origin (Halsall 2000:269). It is possible that both of these burials have Scandinavian links. Alternatively, it may be that the burials are simply of individuals distinguished in death on the basis of their standing in life or due to the unusual circumstances of their death.

Grave goods were not the only type of grave elaboration with a chronological distribution confined to the first half of the study period. The bed burials both within and outside Wessex were confined to the seventh century, with the majority falling between 650-700AD (Speake 1989:110). Similarly, fourteen of the graves with ledges date from the seventh and eighth century, indicating that the use of ledges was predominately a middle Saxon mortuary phenomenon. However, there are two late Saxon burials in the sample, grave 59 from Bevis Grave (Ha),[37] and grave 150 from Wells Cathedral that indicate that the practice did persist into the late Saxon period.

The latter part of the study period also saw the emergence of new practices in the form of charcoal lined burials. The practice of lining the base of graves with charcoal is thought to have originated in the early ninth century, becoming more prevalent in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:228). The practice appears to have declined during the twelfth century, although charcoal burials are known from post-Conquest contexts but they are rare and the charcoal is placed within not below the coffin as in the early medieval period (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005). The examples from Wessex adhered to this general chronological framework with all of the examples identified lying in cemeteries which were in use during the late Saxon period, although at least one site, Romsey Abbey, may have been in use from the seventh century. In addition, within the study area, charcoal burials were notable by their absence in cemeteries that go out of use by the end of the eighth century. Seven of the charcoal burials have been radiocarbon dated (table 5.22) with the majority suggesting a post eighth-century date.

The period 600-1100AD saw major changes in the nature of funerary provision, with the continuity of some forms of grave elaboration, the virtual disappearance of others, as well as the emergence of new forms. These changes in funerary provision are a reflection of both the changing nature of early medieval society and perhaps more importantly of shifts in the importance of the body and the grave within funerary rites. Little is known of the beliefs or

[37] Grave 59 was radiocarbon dated at 2σ to 890-1020 AD (part of a programme of radiocarbon dates obtained during the course of this study, see chapter 3 for more information)

the complete spectrum of funerary rites which occurred outside the grave itself during the early Saxon period. The presence of furnished burial, within the eastern part of the study area, suggests that the display of the body within the grave, adorned in some cases with jewellery or accompanied by weapons, tools or other items, was an important forum within the funerary process for conveying information about the individual. In contrast, much more is understood about the beliefs and the funerary practices which both preceded and followed the burial of the body during the late Saxon period. Unlike during the early and middle Saxon period, the display of the body within the grave appears to have been less central to funerary process with the body often obscured from view in shrouds and/or coffins, and encased within masonry and timber structures.[38] Rather than enhancing aspects of the individual's identity by the use of clothing or grave goods, the deceased of late Saxon Wessex were, to some extent, robbed of their individuality within the grave by being removed from view within shrouds and coffins, with variations in the forms of coffins and stone linings, saying less about the individual than the society in which they lived and their standing within it. This increasing need to encase the body, in part, explains the continuity in the use of stone and wooden structures within the grave as they can serve to both display or encase the body, while practices such as furnished burial which were linked to the display of the body declined. This is not to say that all graves were identical - they were not - but many of the variations in grave elaboration seen in late Saxon graves do not seem to have an obvious role in the display of the body.

5.4. The geographical distribution of grave types and grave furnishings in Wessex heartlands

While some types of grave elaboration, such as the use of coffins or wooden linings, charcoal-lined graves and pillow stones, were found throughout the study area, others such as grave goods and the use of stone in the grave exhibited distinct geographical variations in their distribution (table 5.23). One of the factors that has the potential to affect the distribution of funerary practices is the availability of raw materials and this may explain the distribution of stone grave linings and coverings within the study area. The majority of the sites with stone-lined graves and/or stone coverings are found in the western part of the study

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[38] This does not mean that the body was not displayed prior to its deposition in the grave. The tenth-century *Regularis Concordia*, when outlining the appropriate funerary rites for a member of a monastic house, states that the body of the deceased "shall then be bourne into the church with the chanting of psalms and the tolling of bells" (*Regularis Concordia* XII:66 – Symons 1953:65). A century later, the *Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, when describing the burial of the dead, state that "when the corpse is placed in the usual position in the church the bells cease to toll ; the cross is set up at the head of the dead man, and the two candlesticks are placed one at the head and the other at his feet, with tapers burning without cease till the body is taken out for burial" (*Lanfranc's Monastic Constitutions* 113 - Brooke 2002:185)

area, with eleven of the 21 sites with stone linings lying in Somerset, with another four in Dorset and Devon (tables 5.3. & 5.15). In addition, those cemeteries with stone linings and/or covers in the eastern part of the study area generally tend to contain a lower percentage of burials with stone than is seen in the western cemeteries. The geology underlying much of the eastern part of the study area is chalk, which offers no readily available stone with which to line or cover a grave apart from flint. In contrast, many of the western sites overlie limestone or sandstone bedrock, which provide a ready source of easily worked stone. In some cases, geology may not be the only factor influencing the distribution of stone-lined graves. The late Roman period saw the development of the practice of lining graves, either completely or partially, with stone (Philpott 1991:65), particularly in areas along the Jurassic oolitic and limestone belt which transects the country and runs through Somerset and Dorset (*ibid.* 61). Both of these counties, unlike the eastern part of the study area, contain cemeteries, such as Tolpuddle Ball (Do), Henley Wood (So) and Cannington (So), which were founded in the late Roman period and continue in use into the seventh or eighth centuries. As such, there is the possibility that the use of stone lined graves in some cemeteries in these counties may also represent a continuity of Roman burial customs (Boyle 1995:121), a continuity unlikely to be present in the eastern counties.

The availability of raw materials is not the only factor to affect the geographical distribution of mortuary rites. Furnished burials are found throughout the eastern counties of the study area – Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire during the seventh century.[39] In the western part of the study area, furnished burials are confined to the eastern parts of Somerset and Dorset, with no known examples of seventh- or eighth-century furnished burials known from Devon.[40] The distribution of furnished burials across the study area during the seventh century echoes to a large extent that seen in the fifth and sixth centuries when the practice was almost completely absent from the western counties of Somerset, Dorset and Devon as well as parts of west and north Wiltshire (Eagles 2001:219-220 & 1994:17-18).[41] The seventh century saw change in this distribution with furnished burials appearing in west Wiltshire, eastern Dorset and eastern Somerset for the first time (Eagles 1994: 17-18), or late

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[39] There are no furnished burials on the Isle of Wight that can be securely dated to the seventh century, although one possible seventh-century burial has been identified within the fifth- to seventh-century cemetery at Chessel Down (Geake 1999: 14). The absence of furnished seventh-century burials on the Island is likely to be due to the absence of middle Saxon burials (Geake 2002:147).

[40] There is an example of a late Saxon burial from Exeter cathedral, which was interred with a gold ring (Graham-Campbell 1982). It could be argued that the absence of grave goods in Devon was due to the paucity of burial evidence with only three cemeteries securely dated to the early medieval period. Yet the one cemetery in Devon, which might on chronological grounds be expected to contain grave goods, the fifth- to eighth-century cemetery at Kenn, yielded no objects from any of the 111 graves (Wedell 2000).

[41] An exception to this is the isolated sixth-century furnished burial from Wimbourne St. Giles (Do) (Hoare 1812:236-7) and there may also have been furnished burials of the same date from Hardown Hill (Do) (Evison 1968).

sixth - early seventh century in the case of the Bargates cemetery (Do) on the Hampshire-Dorset border (Jarvis 1983). The expansion of furnished burial into the western part of the study area during the seventh century coincides with the period of West Saxon westward expansion (Yorke 1995:60). Within this historic context, the appearance of furnished burial may have been the result of West Saxon settlement or the increased exposure to West Saxon *mores*, the means of signalling political affiliation to the new royal house, the simple transmission of mortuary customs, or most probably a combination of all of the above.

The seventh century saw not only the expansion of grave goods into further into the west of the study area, but also the increasing homogeneity in the types of grave goods found across the study area and at a national level (Leeds 1936:98; Meaney & Hawkes 1970:45; Geake 1997:125-6; 1999:204-5). During the fifth and sixth centuries, there was marked regional variation in the distribution of many grave goods (*ibid.*:204), particularly female jewellery such as saucer brooches (Dickinson 1993) and wrist-clasps (Hines 1984). There also appears to have been regional differences in the way brooches and other dress fasteners were used (Stoodley forthcoming). This can be seen within the study area with female funerary costumes being fastened by a single brooch or pin in southern Hampshire, while in northern Hampshire a pair of brooches at the shoulders was used. The late sixth century saw a marked change in type of grave goods found in England. There was a decline in the use of brooches in funerary female dress, changes in the composition of weapon assemblages and in the use of containers (Geake 1997:129-30). This change in the types of grave good used also saw the virtual disappearance of regional variation with seventh century grave goods exhibiting a high level of homogeneity across those areas of the country where furnished burial occurred.

Some funerary practices exhibited a more localised distribution within the study area, being found in a few cemeteries often with the majority of examples found within a small geographical area. There are only a few examples of bed burials, or possible bed burials, within the study area and their distribution is confined to the area of the Wiltshire/Dorset border, with Winkelbury Hill and Swallowcliffe Down lying 4.5 km apart. Head recesses were only found in two cemeteries within the study area, Trowbridge and Wells Cathedral, while ledges were mainly concentrated in three Hampshire cemeteries – Bevis Grave, SOU 32 and Winnall II - with single examples found at Roche Court Down II, Wells Cathedral and Lowbury Hill (table 5.7). There is no chronological basis for the restricted distribution of any of these funerary practices as there are many other cemeteries of contemporary date to those exhibiting these variants within the study area, all of which lack these features. It

seems likely that the limited distribution of these funerary practices may simply reflect variations in grave structure only adopted by certain communities within the study area.

There appears to be an increasing degree of homogeneity in grave elaboration across the study area during the study period. Many of the funerary practices which exhibit distinct geographical variation, such as grave goods, ledges and bed burials, are mainly confined to the seventh and eighth centuries. In contrast, many of the funerary practices which either appear or become more popular during the late Saxon period, such as charcoal burials, iron coffin fittings and pillow stones, are found throughout the study area. The only major exception is the use of stone grave linings and coverings which is dependant on the availability of raw materials. Overall, the picture is one of greater homogeneity in grave elaboration across the study area. However, this increased homogeneity does not necessarily equate with greater uniformity in grave elaboration between all sites (table 5.24). Marked variations in the range of grave types and grave variations and in the numbers of individuals accorded more elaborate burials has been observed among late Saxon cemeteries in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (Buckberry in press). A similar pattern can be seen among late Saxon cemeteries in Wessex. Some cemeteries, such as the Old and New Minsters in Winchester, Bath Abbey, Exeter Cathedral and Wells Cathedral exhibit a wide range of grave types and grave variations (table 5.24). Other sites, such as the manorial cemeteries of Portchester and Trowbridge, lack some of the variation in funerary practice seen in these sites. The sites exhibiting lower levels of diversity in funerary provision also tend to have fewer elaborate graves. For example, there is only a single example of a charcoal burial in each of the large Saxon cemeteries at Barnstaple and Trowbridge compared to nine among the 31 burials from Bath Abbey and 61 from 114 graves at Exeter (table 5.4). It has been suggested that this clustering of high levels of grave types and grave variations combined with large number of elaborate graves is a reflection of the high status of some religious establishments and their associated graveyards during the late Saxon period (Buckberry in press). Such an explanation fits the Wessex material. The minsters at Winchester had royal and episcopal connections, likewise Wells and Exeter were the sites of bishoprics, while Bath Abbey had royal connections being the location of the coronation of King Edgar (*ASC* A 973 Swanton 2000:118). High-status religious centres were likely to attract the burials of those with means, whose elaborate burials in a prestigious location could be used to signal their high status.

Table 5.24. Distribution of grave types and grave variations within the study area in cemeteries which were in use after the mid-eighth century[i].

Site	Date[ii]	Associated church?	No. of burials	Stone linings	Charcoal Burials	Grave goods	Coffins/ wooden linings	Coffin fittings	Pillow stones	Stone grave covers	Other features/comments
Bevis Grave (Ha)	7th-10th century	No	88	●	–	●	●	–	–	–	–
Wembdon Hill (So)	7th-9th century	No	13	●	–	●	●	–	●	–	–
Beckery Chapel (So)	6th-9th century	Yes	58	●	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
SOU 13 (Ha)	8th-9th century	Yes	81	–	–	●	●	–	–	–	–
Six Dials (Ha)	9th century	No	14	–	–	–	–		–	–	–
St. Mary's Stadium II (Ha)	8th-9th century	No	8	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Gravel lined grave
Wells Cathedral (So)	7th-12th century	Yes	242	●	–	–	●	–	●	●	Head recesses, mortar lined graves
Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Mid-late Saxon	Yes	114	●	●	●	●	●	●[iii]	–	Dark earth linings,
Old Minster, Winchester (Ha)	7th-11th century	Yes	743	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Sand lined grave
New Minster (Ha)	10th-11th century	Yes	109	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	–
Nunnaminster (Ha)	10th-11th century	Yes	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	●	–
Romsey Abbey (Ha)	Mid to late Saxon	Yes	31	●	●	–	–	–	–	–	–
Bath Abbey (So)	8th – 10th century	Yes	31	●	●	–	●	●	●	●	Foot stones
Trowbridge (Wi)	10th-12th century	Yes	164	●	●	–	●	–	●	●	Head recess
Barnstaple Castle (Dv)	Late Saxon	Yes	105	●	●	–	●	–	●	●	–
Staple Gardens (Ha)	9th-11th century	?	288	–	●	●	●	–	●	–	–
Temple of Sulis Minerva (So)	11th century	Yes	15	●	–	–	●	–	●	–	–
Portchester Castle (Ha)	11th century	No	22	–	–	–	●	–	–	–	–
Old Dairy Cottage (Ha)	9th-10th century	No	17	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	Execution cemetery
Stockbridge Down (Ha)	11th century	No	41	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	Execution cemetery

[i] Only includes sites with 5 or more burials.
[ii] Only gives date range for burials included analysis.
[iii] Henderson & Bidwell 1982 report a single grave with pillow stones at Exeter. There is no record of the this pillow stone in the Exeter Cathedral archives, but for the purposes of this study, one pillow stone is recorded as present at Exeter.

While a systematic analysis of grave elaboration on a national level is beyond the scope of this study,[42] it is important to place the range of grave elaboration seen in the study area in a wider context. To this end, data on grave types and grave variation was collated for 25 British cemeteries from outside the study area (table 5.25). All information was drawn from published reports and although an attempt was made to obtain a uniform chronological and geographical distribution of sites, this was not always possible. The table demonstrates the vast majority of forms of grave elaboration seen within the study area are found elsewhere in the British Isles. Bed burials, although not found in the cemeteries in table 5.25, are found outside Wessex, although the practice does have a very restricted national distribution. Outside the study area, bed burials are concentrated around the Cambridgeshire region (Malim & Hines 1998:267) with definite examples found at Edix Hill (Ca) (Malim & Hines 1998), Shudy Camps (Ca) (Lethbridge 1936), Cherry Hinton (Ca) (Kennett 1973) and Ixworth (Su) (Speake 1989:99-101). The only other example in England is geographically isolated from the others, and is found at Lapwing Hill (Db) in the Peak District (Speake 1989:102-105). The lead coffin from Staple Gardens (Ha) is the only known early medieval example in the country, but documentary sources suggest that while not common, their use was more widespread than the archaeological evidence would suggest.[43]

There were some funerary practices seen in the 25 cemeteries that were not seen in the study area. In some cases, this could be explained by differences in preservation. Timber preservation within the study area is poor and it is possible that examples of hazel rods, similar to those found at the waterlogged site of Barton-on-Humber (Li) (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982: 312), may have been found within the study area had levels of timber preservation been better. Poor levels of organic preservation within the study area may also explain the lack of examples comparable to the organic "mat" or "cushion" burials seen at Harford Farm (Nf) (Penn 2000:70). Levels of preservation would not affect the detection of the practice of placing stones in the mouth, which was seen at seen at Raunds Furnells (Nh) (Boddington 1996:41) and St. Nicholas Shambles (GL) (Schofield 1988:25), and there are no comparable examples from within the study area. Similarly, there are no parallels within the study area to the use of clench nails seen at Barton-on-Humber (Rodwell & Rodwell 1982: 291) and Caister-on-Sea (Nf) (Darling 1993:253), which in the latter case appear to come from re-used boat timbers laid over the grave (*ibid.*:254). Although the rivets and

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[42] For surveys of mid-Saxon burial practices see Geake (1997) and Stoodley (1999) (seventh and early eighth century only) and for late Saxon burials practices, see Hadley (2000b) for the Northern Danelaw and Buckberry (2004 & in press) for Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.
[43] See section 5.2.4 for a more detailed discussion.

Figure 5.25. Grave types and grave variations found in cemeteries outside the study area

Site	Date[i]	Associated church?	No. of burials	Stone linings	Charcoal Burials	Grave goods	Coffins/ wooden linings	Coffin fittings	Pillow stones	Stone grave covers	Other features/comments	Reference
Chamberlain's Barn, cemetery II (Bd)	Mid-7th to 8th century	No	68	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	–	Hyslop 1963
Polhill (Kt)	Mid-7th to 8th century	No	107	–	–	●	●	–	–	–	Chalk packing,	Philp 1973
King Harry Lane, St. Albans (Ht)	Mid-7th to 8th century	No	39	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	Ledges, Wooden burial covers.	Stead & Rigby 1989
Harford Farm, Caistor St. Edmund (Nf)	Mid-7th to 8th century	No	47	–	–	●	●	–	–	–	Organic materials placed below bodies, Pillow of organic material	Penn 200
Apple Down, cemetery II (WSx)	Mid-7th to 8th century	No	11	–	–	●	●	–	–	●	–	Down & Welch 1990
Whithorn (D & G)	6th-8th century	No	59	●	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	Hill 1997
	8th to 9th century	Yes	61	–	–	–	●	●	–	–	–	
Tannddderwen (Cl)	7th to 10th century	No	39	–	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	Brassil *et al* 1991
Caer, Bayvil (Dy)	7th to 8th century	No	61	●	–	–	–	–	–	●	–	James 1987
Ailey Hill, Ripon (NYk)	7th to 10th century	No	27	●	–	●	●	●	–	–	–	Hall & Whyman 1996
Castle Green, Hereford (Hf)	7th to 12th century	Yes	62	●	●	–	●	●	●	–	–	Shoesmith 1980
Rivenhall (Ex)	7th to 9th century	No	60	●	–	●	–	–	●	●	–	Rodwell & Rodwell 1985
Addingham (WYk)	8th to 10th century	Yes[ii]	55	–	–	–	?	–	–	–	–	Adams 1996
Caister-on Sea (Nf)	8th to 11th century	?	147	●	–	–	●	–	●	–	Charred timbers, clench nails.	Darling 1993
Lewknor (Ox)	9th century	No	39	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	–	Chambers 1973 & 1976
Chimney (Ox)	9th to 11th century	No	c.17	–	–	●	–	–	–	–	–	Crawford 1989
Raunds Furnells (Nh)	10th to 12th century	Yes	363	●	–	–	–	–	●	●	Stone in mouth, clay lined graves	Boddington 1996
St. Oswald's, Gloucester (Gl)	10th to 12th century	Yes	159	●	●	–	●	●	●	–	–	Heighway & Bryant 1999
St. Patrick's Chapel, Heysham (Ln)	10th-12th century	Yes	78-84	●	–	●	●	–	●	●	–	Potter & Andrews
St. Nicholas Shambles (GL)	11th to 12th century	Yes	234	●	●	–	●	–	●	–	Pebble placed in mouth, mortar & chalk linings	Schofield 1988
North Elmham (Nf)	11th to 12th century	Yes	194	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Wade-Martin
Barton – on –Humber (Li)	Late Saxon	Yes	c.650	●	–	–	●	–	●	–	Hazel rods in graves	Rodwell & Rodwell 1982
Norwich Castle (Nf)	Late Saxon	Yes	69	●	?	–	●	–	●	–	Chalk capping of graves, ledges, Tile lined grave	Ayres 1985
York Minster (NYk)	Late Saxon	Yes	110	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Mortar lined graves, footstones	Phillips & Heywood 1995
St. Augustine's Abbey (Kt)	Late Saxon	Yes	17	–	–	●	●	–	●	–	–	Sherlock & Woods 1988
Milton Keynes (Bu)	Late Saxon	No	Min. 97	–	–	–	–	–	●	–	–	Parkhouse *et al.* 1993

[i] Only gives date range for burials included in the analysis.

[ii] The excavated burials lay c.50m outside the current churchyard.

washers were recovered grave fills from the heavily intercut cemetery at SOU 13 may point to a similar practice of re-using timber in graves (Morton 1992a:48).

5.5. Demographics and grave elaboration

5.5.1. Gender and funerary provision in early medieval Wessex.

Biological sex is known to have significant bearing on the type of grave goods interred with an individual during the fifth and sixth centuries (Stoodley 1999a, 1999c, 2000; Lucy 1998; Härke 1989, 1990, 1992; Brush 1988; Pader 1982). This pattern persists into the seventh century and can clearly been seen in this dataset. For while the numbers of males and females interred with grave goods is roughly comparable (table 5.26), if allowance is made for the slight excess of males and large number of individuals of indeterminate sex within the dataset as a whole, there are marked differences in the type of items which accompany them as illustrated in figure 5.13. Weapons, such as swords, shields, seaxes, and spearheads are invariably found in male burials, with a few notable exceptions such as the seax interred with two possible female burials at the St Mary's Stadium site (Ha) (Stoodley 2005:79). Likewise, some items such as pins, chatelaines, brooches, spindle whorls and necklaces were found in female graves. There are also a number of "neutral" objects, such as knives, coins and animal bones which occur in both male and female burials. However, there is evidence that the signalling of gender became less important in the seventh century with the overall number of graves containing "gendered" grave goods decreasing from 53% of all inhumations in West Saxon cemeteries in the fifth- and sixth-century to only 24% in the seventh-century (Stoodley 1999a:101). This is in part due to the decline in the number of furnished burials and the change in the type and number of grave goods they contained. This can be seen in the study dataset with 151 of the 355 furnished burials identified containing only the gender-neutral knife and/or buckle.

No obvious correlations between the sex of an individual and the presence of evidence for coffins/wooden linings were observed. Overall slightly more male graves (33%) contained evidence for coffins compared with only 26% of female graves (table 5.26). Comparable numbers of male and female burials containing evidence for wooden structures are also seen if some of the larger late Saxon churchyards are considered separately (table 5.27). At Exeter (Dv) and Wells Cathedral (So), there are slightly more male than female burials containing evidence for coffins/wooden linings, while at Staple Gardens (Ha) and Barnstaple (Dv) roughly comparable levels were observed in both sexes. Overall, while the data

Table 5.26. Distribution of grave type and grave variation by sex

Grave type or grave variation	Number of burials	Male burials		Female burials		Burials of indeterminate sex	
		Number	% of burials with that variation	Number	% of burials with that variation	Number	% of burials with that variation
Stone linings	120[i]	40	33.3	41	34.2	39	32.5
Charcoal burials	86	16	18.6	7	8.14	64	74.4
Head recesses	8	5	62.5	3	37.5	0	0
Grave goods	333	91	27.3	68	20.4	174	52.3
Wooden coffins or linings	240[ii]	80	33.3	62	25.8	98	40.8
Pillow stones	66	31	47.0	18	27.2	17	25.7
Stone grave coverings	44	8	18.2	15	34.1	21	47.7

Table 5.27. The relationship between evidence for coffins and biological sex by cemetery[•]

Biological sex		Sites			
		Staple Gardens (Ha)	Wells Cathedral (So)	Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Barnstaple Castle (Dv)
Male	No. of individuals	16	12	8	14
	%	31.4	29.3	29.6	30.4
Female	No of individuals	17	10	4	15
	%	33.3	24.4	14.8	32.6
Indeterminate	No. of individuals	18	19	15	17
	%	35.3	46.3	55.6	37.0

Table 5.28. The relationship between type of stone lining and biological sex.

Type of Stone lining	Biological sex					
	Male		Female		Indeterminate	
	Number	% of stone lined graves	Number	% of stone lined graves	Number	% of stone lined graves
Complete stone lining	2	41.4	6	4.3	2	4.3
Partially lined graves	16	11.3	19	13.5	15	10.6
Few stones in grave	22	15.6	16	11.3	31	21.9
Possible stone lining	7	5.0	6	4.3	3	2.1

[i] The 16 burials with possible or conflicting evidence for stone linings are not included in this analysis.
[ii] The 19 burials with possible or conflicting evidence for a coffin or wooden lining are not included in this analysis.
[•] For cemeteries where over 20 graves contain evidence for coffins

suggests a slightly higher number of males interred with coffins/wooden linings, given the high percentage of individuals of indeterminate sex, it is impossible to know if this is important. In an analysis of wooden structures in fifth- to seventh- century graves from Wessex, boards and planks were found to be associated with male burials, while coffins were found with twice as many female as male burials (Stoodley 1999a:62). The poor levels of organic preservation seen among the study sample make it difficult to distinguishing between wooden, lining, boards and coffins with a high degree of certainty. As such, it is possible that by treating coffins, planks and wooden linings as a single group in this study, gender differences in the use of these different types of wooden funerary furniture may have been inadvertently obscured. However, a recent study detected no significant correlation between types of wooden funerary structure and sex at either of the late Saxon sites of Barton-on-Humber (Li) and Swinegate (NYk) where there was good preservation of timber structures (Buckberry 2004 & in press). Furthermore, the one readily distinguished category of wooden furnishing within the study area, those with coffin fittings, echoes the general trend with four males, two females and seventeen individuals of indeterminate sex being interred in iron bound coffins. However, another type of wooden funerary structure, beds, appears to be predominately a female rite, with 7 of the 11 known bed burials in this country being female. The only definitely male bed burial is that from Lapwing Hill (Db) while the occupant from grave 29 at Shudy Camps (Ca) was tentatively identified as male (Speake 1989:110).

No overall relationship was observed between biological sex and stone grave linings, with roughly comparable numbers of male (45 burials) and female (47 burials) graves containing stones, 31.9% and 33.3% of all stone burials respectively. However, if the different types of stone lining are examined (table 5.28), there are some gender differences with all six completely lined graves containing female burials while there are slightly more male than female graves containing only a few stones. This does raise the possibility that completely lined graves, were preferentially accorded to females, although given the relatively small number of burials involved it is impossible to determine if these variations are significant. A similar pattern was seen in graves with complete stone coverings with seven females to one male (table 5.29). A trend present, although less pronounced, when all types of stone grave coverings are considered (table 5.29). The study identified a similar number of male and female burials with head recesses, indicating there was no obvious gender bias within this small sample.

Other aspects of grave elaboration may exhibit a loose association with sex, but the nature of the sample makes it difficult to determine if this is significant. For example, within the study

Table 5.29. Distribution of stone grave covering by sex.

Sex	Type of stone cover			All types	% of all stone lined graves
	Few stones over body	Partially covered	Stone grave cover		
Male	3	4	1	8	18.2%
Female	6	2	7	15	34.1%
Indeterminate	12	5	4	21	47.7%

Table 5.30. Distribution of grave type and grave variation by age

Grave type or grave variation	Number of burials	Adult burials		Juvenile burials		Burials of indeterminate age	
		Number	% of burials with that variation	Number	% of burials with that variation	Number	% of burials with that variation
Stone linings	126[iii]	84	66.7	35	27.8	7	5.5
Charcoal burials	86	36	41.4	1	1.1	50	57.5
Head recesses	8	8	100	0	0	0	0
Grave goods	333	178	53.4	42	12.6	113	34.0
Wooden coffins or linings	240[iv]	180	75.0	34	14.2	26	10.8
Pillow stones	66	49	74.2	11	16.7	6	9.1
Stone grave coverings	44	13	29.5	26	59.1	5	11.4

*Table 5.31. The relationship between evidence for coffins and age by cemetery**

Age categories		Sites			
		Staple Gardens (Ha)	Wells Cathedral (So)	Exeter Cathedral (Dv)	Barnstaple Castle (Dv)
No. of individuals	Infant	2	3	-	2
	Child	7	4	-	5
	Teenager	3	1	-	1
	Young adult	4	6	5	11
	Mature adult	7	4	3	14
	Old adult	4	4	-	-
	Adult	23	18	11	9
	Unknown	1	1	8	4
Percentage	Juveniles[$]	23%	19.5%	-	17.4%
	Adults	75%	78%	70.3%	73.9%
	Indeterminate	2%	2.5%	29.7%	8.7%

[iii] The 16 burials with possible or conflicting evidence for stone linings are not included in this analysis.
[iv] The 19 burials with possible or conflicting evidence for a coffin or wooden lining are not included in this analysis.
[$] includes categories of infant, child & teenager

sample, more males (18.4%) than females (8.0%) had charcoal lined graves (table 5.26), although, 72.4% of the sample of indeterminate sex, caution should be used when interpreting this data. Similarly, pillow stones were recovered from more male (47%) than female burials (27%) (table 5.26). However, this may, in part, be a distortion caused by Bath Abbey (So), a site which produced few female burials and a comparatively high number of burials with pillow stones. Overall, the data suggests that the use of pillow stones was not strongly affected either by an individual's sex or age, although there may just be a very slight bias towards adult males. Likewise, six of the graves in the sample with ledges contained female burials compared with only one male, but as the sex of 50% of the individuals is unknown and given the size of the sample small, caution should be exercised in drawing any conclusions from these figures.

5.5.2. Age and funerary provision in early medieval Wessex

As with sex, an individual's age had a profound affect on whether they were accorded grave goods and the type of grave goods placed in the grave. It is evident from table 5.30 that grave goods were preferentially accorded to adults, even if allowances are made for the relatively low levels of juveniles seen in many of the cemeteries with furnished burials. Furthermore, certain grave goods seem to have been only the preserve of adults. Items, such as spears, shields, seaxes and shears, were only found in adult graves, while other items such as knives, combs, pins, and buckles were found in both juvenile and adult graves. Interestingly, it is the objects with strong male affiliations that seem in general to be excluded from juvenile burials while those with neutral and female affiliation are interred with the young. This is a finding which reflects those of a number of other studies (Geake 1997:128-9; Härke 1992:160).

While no other aspect of grave elaboration exhibited the strong association seen between grave goods and age, a number of variables were found predominantly in adult burials. All, bar one, of the graves with a charcoal lining, where the age of the occupant could be determined, contained adults (table 5.30). However, it should be noted that the absence of sub-adult burials from both Bath Abbey and Exeter Cathedral may have served to distort the data. However, this lack of sub-adult charcoal burials echoes findings from the Old and New Minister where only 4 of 96 charcoal burials contained sub-adults (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992:231), which suggests that charcoal burial was preferentially, but not exclusively, accorded to adults. Similarly, the absence of any juvenile burials with head recesses suggests that this type of grave elaboration may have been preferentially accorded to adults, although with only eight burials the sample is too small to draw any firm conclusions (table 5.30).

There is a slight suggestion that ledges were predominately present in adult graves, with all burials of known age (10 out of the 15) being adult (table 5.7). However, it should be noted that the dimensions of graves 436 and 465 from New Gaol Field (SOU 32) suggest the occupants were children although no bone survives (Morton 1992a:174-5). There was, also, a slightly higher incidence of pillow stones accompanying adult burials (74.2%) than might be expected when compared with the overall demographic profile of the population where adults comprise 61% of the study population.

A number of forms of grave elaboration exhibited no correlation with age. Thirty-four (14.2%) of the graves containing evidence for coffins/wooden linings belonged to sub-adults. This is comparable to the level of sub-adults within the entire study sample (17%) and suggests that age was not a significant factor in determining this aspect of funerary provision. However, only 5.9% of sub-adult graves containing evidence for coffins/wooden lining were found in pre-eighth century contexts, with the majority of burials (79.4%) coming from just three cemeteries: Staple Gardens, Barnstaple Castle and Wells Cathedral (table 5.31). As these cemeteries contain both high numbers of juvenile burials and high numbers of graves with evidence for coffins/wooden linings, this is not unexpected. Yet, it does raise the question of whether juveniles from communities with a higher level of wooden linings/coffins were more likely to be interred within a coffin/wooden lining than those from communities where the incidence was lower. Similarly, no correlation was observed between the age of an individual and the presence of stone grave coverings or with the inclusion of pillow stones in a grave (table 5.30 & 5.32).

As with coffins/wooden linings, no overall correlation between age and stone lined graves was observed within the data set (table 5.30). However, as with sex, some slight differences were observed if the different types of stone lining were considered separately (table 5.33). All six of the completely lined graves contained either adults or adolescents. While the small size of the sample makes any conclusions tentative at best, it does raise the possibility that completely lined graves were preferentially accorded to adult and teenager age groups.

5.5.3. The changing role age and sex in determining funerary provision

The sex and age of the deceased are known to have strongly influenced the grave good assemblages with which an individual was interred during the early Saxon period (Stoodley 1999a, 2000; Lucy 1998; Härke 1989, 1990, 1992; Brush 1988; Pader 1982). Age and sex continued to influence the grave goods accorded an individual during the seventh century although that influence was less pronounced (see discussion above). However, the strong

Table 5.32. Distribution of stone grave coverings by type and age.

Age category	Type of stone cover			All types	% of all stone lined graves
	Few stones over body	Partially covered	Stone grave cover		
Infant	4	-	2	6	13.6%
Child	1	3	-	4	9.1%
Teenager	1	1	1	3	6.8%
Young adult	-	-	1	1	2.3%
Mature Adult	4	2	2	8	18.2%
Older adult	2	2	1	5	11.3%
Adult	5	3	4	12	27.3%
Unknown	4	-	1	5	11.4%

Table 5.33. Distribution of stone lined graves by type and age

Age category	Type of stone lining				All types	% of all stone lined graves
	Few stones	Partially lined	Complete lining	Possible lining		
Infant	3	1	-	-	4	2.8%
Child	16	9	-	1	26	17.7%
Teenager	3	2	1	1	7	5.0%
Young adult	12	5	1	4	22	15.6%
Mature Adult	19	17	2	8	46	32.6%
Older adult	6	6	-	-	12	8.5%
Adult	6	8	2	2	18	12.1%
Unknown	4	3	-	1	8	5.7%

correlations between sex, and to a lesser extent age, and grave goods is not seen with other types of grave elaboration. There are suggestions that some other variations within the grave, such as charcoal burials, ledges within the grave and head recesses, were preferentially accorded to adults, while others such as bed burials and head recesses are found primarily with female and male individuals respectively. While the use of stone grave linings, stone grave covering and wooden coffins and or lining, appear to be largely independent of the age and sex of an individual. As such, with the decline in the use of grave goods during the seventh- and eighth-century, gender and, to a lesser extent age, ceased to be signalled strongly within the grave itself. This finding echoes that of other works on gender and age in late Saxon burials (Buckberry 2004 & in press; Hadley 2004). Clearly, gender and age would have been conveyed by the way the deceased was adorned and the practice of clothed burial, and with it the signalling of gender and age, may have persisted into the late Saxon period. Eventually, however, the increasing use of shrouds would have served to remove the last vestiges of the signalling of gender and age within the grave, with the body rendered both ageless and sexless by an all encompassing shroud.

The decline in the use of grave goods also served to change the relationship between the world of the living and the contents of the grave. The majority of grave goods, such as weapons, jewellery, vessels and tools, were not produced exclusively for the grave, but rather first played a role in the world of the living before being consigned to the grave. From this perspective, grave goods are unique among types of grave elaboration, with the possible exception of bed burials. The pillow stones, charcoal burials, timber and stone found in graves are not first used by the living or at least not in the same way as in the grave. For, although stone linings or wooden structures may contain reused masonry or timbers, coffins and timber or stone grave linings are created to house and serve the dead and perform no role in the land of the living. It seems likely that the association between some grave goods and the age and sex of the individual they accompany are at least in part a reflection of connotations the objects acquired in the land of the living. As such, it may simply be that the use of grave goods, many with inherent links to gender or age, brought with it gender and age into the grave and that their decline led to the removal of age and gender signalling within later Saxon graves.

5.6. Christianity and grave elaboration

It is clear from the evidence discussed that the period 600-1100AD saw both continuity and change in funerary practices, but to what extent are any of the changes seen in mortuary

behaviour a response to the arrival and consolidation of the Roman Church? Traditionally, the introduction of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England at the end of the sixth century was seen as the catalyst for the decline of grave goods seen in the seventh and eighth century (Leeds 1936:96; Meaney & Hawkes 1970:53).[44] However, this model has been increasingly questioned (Boddington 1990:94; Halsall 1995b:61-3; Hadley 2000a:170) as there is no evidence that the Church was particularly concerned with how individuals were buried in the seventh and eighth century (Bullough 1989:185) or that it saw grave goods as being synonymous with paganism (Young 1999:74). Moreover, even if the early Anglo-Saxon Church wished to dictate mortuary behaviour during the seventh century, its tenuous footing in England and its intermittent contact with the majority of the population meant it was hardly in position to be able to instigate widespread change in funerary practices (Morris 1989:91).[45]

Thus if the introduction of a new faith did not instigate changes in the use of grave goods, what was responsible? The differences between sixth- and seventh-century grave good assemblages are at least in part due to changes in clothing styles, c.600AD (Samson 1999:133), while the decline in the use of grave goods may in part reflect changes in the overall organisation of funerary processes (*ibid.*:140). If furnished burials are seen as containing clothed individuals, the rise in unaccompanied burial may be a reflection of the increasing use of shrouds. The practice of shrouded burial, in turn, may be synonymous with a shift within the funerary process away from the body with the information once conveyed by an elaborately dressed and accompanied burial now expressed in other aspects of the funerary process, such as those elements which preceded and followed the funeral. However, it is equally possible that the changes in society during the seventh and eighth served to render the role of grave goods obsolete.

The basic problem in understanding the decline in the use of grave goods is that the factors which led to objects being added to burials, during the three centuries that furnished burial was practiced in early medieval England, are far from fully understood (James 1989:34-35), making it much more difficult to explain the decline in their use. It is worth noting that the seventh and eighth centuries saw the decline and eventually the virtual absence of grave goods not only in Anglo-Saxon England, but across much of Western Europe (Halsall 1995b: 62). This suggests that the catalyst for change may lie in Europe-wide changes in technologies, trade relationships and social and political structures seen during the seventh and eighth centuries (Geake 1997:1). It seems likely that some aspect of these changes,

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[44] This is discussed more fully in section 2.1.1.
[45] See section 2.1.2. for more details

particularly the increased formalisation of social structures, may have reduced or eliminated the need to signal particular aspects of an individual's identity using grave goods within the funerary arena (Lucy 2000:184). Furthermore, the increasingly complex social and political structures would have made new demands on resources in the form of taxation, which may have resulted in the decline of grave goods (Carver 1989:157). Indeed, the late Saxon law requiring the payment of military equipment by every male over thegnly rank to his lord on his death may have claimed items once destined for the grave (Brooks 1978:81 & 92).[46] Although it is unclear when this payment, called a heriot, was first levied and thus impossible to know if its appearance coincided with the decline of grave goods or whether the two events are unrelated and possibly chronologically distinct. It can also be argued that the decline in grave goods did not see the end of displays of conspicuous consumption, but rather changes in the most appropriate forum for them. For example, the practice of placing weapons within graves, by and large, ceases at the end of the eighth century yet the practice of depositing weapons seems to have persisted in the form of riverine offerings into the late Saxon period (Härke 2000:389). Finally, it is important to recognise that while the church may not have had a direct impact on the decline in the use of grave goods it may have indirectly contributed to the process. As discussed above, increased demands on resources may have contributed to the decline in grave goods and the church, by the late eighth century, may also have placed a similar drain on resources with its needs for land, livestock and food, and thus may have indirectly contributed to the decline in furnished burial (Blair 1988; Geake 1992:91). Also, the Church provided an alternative recipient for the wealth of the deceased and their family with the grave goods of the seventh and eighth century perhaps being replaced by gifts to the church in the later Saxon period.

So if the Church was not responsible for the decline in the use of grave goods, how did the arrival of a new faith influence the form of the grave and its contents? The available evidence suggests that instead of looking for widespread sweeping changes, the impact of the new faith on grave form was often indirect and subtle. For example, returning to grave goods, the arrival of the Church did not signal their demise, although it may have indirectly contributed to the process (see above). Furthermore, the arrival of the Church may have influenced the form of some grave goods during the seventh and eight century. For example, it has been suggested that the arrival of the Roman Church promoted ties with the Mediterranean world and facilitated the introduction of classically influenced grave goods

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[46] An example of the type of goods which could comprise this payment (called a heriot) can be found in the late tenth-century will of Ealdorman Aethelmaer, who wished to be buried at the New Minster in Winchester – "And I bequeathe to my royal lord as my heriot four armlets of three hundred mancuses of gold, and four swords and eight horses, four with trappings and four without, four helmets and four coats of mail and eight spears and eight shields." (Whitelock 1930:27)

into England (Geake 1997:132-134). However, the use of these grave goods should not necessarily be seen as indicative of an individual's conversion to Christianity or even of a tie to the Church. Likewise, the presence of items bearing the traditional symbol of Christianity, the cross[47], or other Christian motifs[48], does not imply the occupant of the grave was Christian.

The Church had a similarly indirect influence on the nature of the grave and its furnishing in the later Saxon period. The majority of variations seen in late Saxon churchyards, such as wooden linings/coffins, coffin fittings and the use of stone coverings predate the consolidation of the Church of Rome in England and in some cases, the arrival of the Roman missionaries. However, the way these variables were used was indirectly influenced by the Church. The earliest churchyards within the study area, such as SOU 13, are characterised by a marked lack of variation in the form and furnishings of the grave. In contrast, many, but not all, churchyards in use during the tenth and eleventh centuries exhibit greater diversity in grave elaboration. The tenth and eleventh centuries saw an increasing proportion of the population interred on sacred ground, and burial near to a church alone was no longer sufficient to denote high status. Many of the forms of grave elaboration discussed above, such as mortar-lined graves, coffin fittings, head niches and stone cists, reflect extra expenditure of time or resources and are linked to high status. Many of these variations appear at a time when churchyard burial was becoming increasingly prevalent and were used to distinguish high-status burials. As such, it could be argued that the consolidation of the Church in the later Saxon period, with the associated rise in the popularity of churchyard burial, indirectly resulted in an increase in grave elaboration as those with means sought ways to distinguish themselves in death. Occasionally, the late Saxon Church also had a more direct impact on grave elaboration. Charcoal burials have often been thought to perform some penitential function and their appearance in the ninth century may be linked to the growing influence of the Church and its teachings in late Saxon Wessex. Similarly, the use of stones to support the head may have been a sign of humility or penitence (Daniell 1997:160). Alternatively, the increase in the use of pillow stones in the late Saxon period may be linked to the belief in bodily resurrection. Perhaps as the body was raised from the grave on the Day of Judgement, it was important to be facing the right way.

Overall, the evidence discussed above suggests that the arrival and consolidation of the church of Rome did not have a profound effect on the form and furnishing of graves during

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[47] For example, a pair of linked pins attached to a central gold mounted paste study bearing a cruciform design was recovered from the grave fill at Roundway Hill (Cunnington 1860:165).
[48] It has been suggested that the circular design on the Satchel accompanying the bed burial at Swallowcliffe down may be similar to a simplified Chi-Rho monogram (Speake 1989:80)

the early medieval period. This is not to say it had no impact – it did. It is just that the Church's impact on this aspect of mortuary behaviour was often indirect and subtle. Thus, it is necessary to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond the grave and examine in the next three chapters, above ground commemoration and the development of churchyard burial, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the church on early medieval mortuary practices.